

Ethics in linguistic fieldwork: consent in documentation and archiving

Keren Rice

University of Toronto

Archiving ethically: Mediating the demands of communities and institutional sponsors when producing language documentation

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Some questions

- What is consent?
- Why does consent matter in fieldwork?
- Why does consent matter in archiving?
- What makes consent complex?

What is consent?


- Individuals who participate in research ‘should do so voluntarily, understanding the purpose of the research and its risks and potential benefits as fully as possible. Where a person has the capacity to understand this information, and the ability to act on it voluntarily, the decision to participate is generally seen as an expression of autonomy.’

Canadian draft statement on ethical conduct in research



What principles govern consent?

Consent should be ‘voluntary, informed and ongoing’




What are ‘voluntary, informed, ongoing?’ - voluntary

Voluntariness is important because ‘it means that an individual has chosen to participate according to his or her own values, preferences, and wishes.’

Consent shall be given voluntarily.

Consent may be withdrawn at any time.

If a participant withdraws consent, s/he can request the withdrawal of his or her data.




What are ‘voluntary, informed, ongoing?’ - informed

‘Researchers shall provide to prospective participants full disclosure of all information necessary for making an informed decision to participate in a research project.’

- statement of the research purpose in plain language
- statement of possible risks and benefits in plain language
- statement of conditions of participation

Basically, participants must understand what the research is all about.



What are ‘voluntary, informed, ongoing?’ - ongoing

‘Consent shall be maintained through participation in the research.’

As the research continues, participants must continue to be informed about the research, and be able to withdraw from participation at any point.



Why is consent important?

Core ethical values involves respect for human dignity – respect for persons, concern for welfare, justice.

‘Respect for persons is expressed principally through securing the voluntary, informed consent of research participants.’



Why is consent important?

Linguistic research can blur the line between researcher and participant.

Documentary linguistics involves the recording of rich textual material.

Consent can help create a clear and shared understanding of roles, responsibilities, and use of materials.



Who gives consent?

Are speakers participants in the research, or co-researchers?

Assuming speakers are considered to be participants by research ethics boards, then who gives consent?

- Individual?
- Community?
- Family?



What does it mean to give consent?

What is the form of consent?

What is consented to?



What does consent allow?

Does consent allow a researcher free rein to do with material collected as s/he pleases?

How is credit given to the narrator of a story, or person from who language material is collected?

Can we assume that, across communities and over time, decisions made will be the same?



Why does consent matter for archiving?

Archiving makes materials available for the future.

Participants must understand this, and give their consent for this to be the case.



Questions about archiving

Who determines what is archived?

linguist?

speaker?

community?

Who has access to what is archived?

Are there restrictions on when material becomes available?

These questions about rights and access are part of consent.



Legacy materials and archiving

Was consent to archive given when the materials were collected?

Yes: What were the conditions?

Can materials be made freely and openly available?



Legacy materials and archiving

Was consent to archiving given when the materials were collected?

No:

Is the person from who recorded the material still alive?

Is there family that might give consent?

Could community representatives give consent?



Some questions to consider

Recording: audio/video

Who is material available to?

Is it available for time immemorial? Is it available only after a certain amount of time has passed?

What form is it to be available in?



The value of archived material for language revitalization

The language reclamation projects that have been undertaken show the value of archived material.

Materials – recorded or written – cannot be archived without appropriate consent.

It is important to work with people, both speakers/communities and those in your (university if you have one), to ensure appropriate consent.



Draft 2nd Edition of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical
Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS). Revised
December 2009. Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics.

www.pre.ethics.gc.ca

chapter 3. Consent

chapter 9. Research involving Aboriginal peoples in Canada