Fieldwork Ethics and Community Responsibility

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By inclination and as a matter of necessity, sociolinguists have always been sensitive to the ethical dimensions of fieldwork and thoughtful about their responsibilities to the communities they study. However, definitions of ethical fieldwork and community responsibility have changed somewhat with the times. We are now aware, in a way we have not always been, of how choices about research methods are grounded in assumptions about knowledge, authority, language, and humanity, and we now consider more carefully what such assumptions imply about the best ways to work.

Some sociolinguists still think of themselves as objective observers, whose job is to examine the people and the linguistic facts they study in as detached a way as possible. The can then return to their scientific communities, once fieldwork is over, with new knowledge about the causes of patterns of linguistic behavior. Others, however, ask questions like these: What is knowledge? Are there social and linguistic facts in the world which any disciplined scientist could observe, or are facts, sociolinguistic and otherwise, partly a consequence of often unspoken traditions about what to pay attention to and how to describe things? If so, who establishes such traditions of thinking and seeing, how are they perpetuated, how are they challenged and changed? What is the relationship between the kinds of knowledge scholars develop and circulate and kinds of knowledge developed and circulated by the people we study? If researchers and the people they study are all experts in one way or another, what is the researcher’s role vis-à-vis that of the people we have sometimes called ‘subjects’?

1. Traditional Fieldwork Ethics: Protecting And Serving

According to the ideas about science and scholarship that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s, the role of a social scientist was to observe and interpret the behavior displayed by the community under study. Early sociolinguists followed this model, for the most part. They took care to adhere to the basic ethical imperative not to cause harm to those they studied, as sociolinguists continue to do, typically using pseudonyms to protect their privacy, for example.

In early sociolinguistic work, as in the field research in dialectology and descriptive linguistics that preceded it, members of the community under study were sometimes involved in the process of data-collection as assistants, who might help interview others or record or organize data, or as ‘informants’—native speakers of the local language or variety who were hired to answer researchers’ questions about linguistic structure or meaning. Other people in the community might be involved only as objects of scrutiny or manipulation: as interviewees, as subjects participating in controlled studies or otherwise observed and/or recorded. Although procedures for ensuring informed consent are more stringent now than they once were, most sociolinguists have always explained to the people they studied, in one way or another, what they were doing and how the research would proceed, and they have often gone back to the community later on to report to them what they found.

From the beginning, however, sociolinguists have also tried to use what they learned for the benefit of the people they studied. William Labov, who studied the speech of African American youth in a poor New York neighborhood, entered US educational debate to speak out about African American linguistic structure and traditions of language use (Labov 1982). Other variationists have also designed and carried out educational programs meant to make students and teachers aware of the systematicity and value of stigmatized ways of talking (Wolfram et al. 1999). John J. Gumperz (1982) tried to improve workplaces for immigrants to the UK by sensitizing employers and co-workers to sociolinguistic difference. Dell Hymes’ (1981) interest in Native American discourse was partly motivated by his wish to preserve important linguistic traditions and texts. Many sociolinguists have taken their results to the public in speaking and writing about issues such as prescriptivism, miscommunication, and linguistic discrimination, in interviews, films, books and articles meant for general audiences.

People continue to be drawn to sociolinguistic work not only for intellectual reasons but also by the desire to understand and help right things that seem wrong. It continues to be important to find ways of systematically incorporating ‘service in return’ (Rickford 1997) into the design of sociolinguistic research. Newer debates about the sources of truth and the nature of scholarly authority have highlighted the range of possible ways of conceiving of the relationship between sociolinguists and the people they study, the people with whom they work, and the people for whom the products of their work are intended.

2. ‘Communities’ and Individuals

The research of sociolinguists typically focuses on groups of people who are thought likely to have something in common in a linguistic sense: speakers
a situation as one in which Grальное was revealed, or that which, as a result of a situation which
which Grальное has to be expressed, but the use of a thank-you note can reconstitute the re-definition
occasions. Thank-you notes, for example, are conventionally required in certain situations in
occasions. Recurrent text-types mark recurrent social occasions, but they also categorize
discourse types as a conventionally vetted form associated with a conventionally embedded purpose of
within classes). A genre is usually defined by people who are interested in categorizing
in the arrangements of collections of folklore and to teach people to produce them (for example, in
An analysis of the forms of lexica can be and have been used to categorize texts (for example,
called " Genre Knowledge" [Berek et al., 1995]).
lem, the skills, understandings, or activities through which these text-types are produced and
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purpose for writing or speech in a community are referred to as Genres. In some uses of the
purpose for writing or speech in a community are referred to as Genres. In some cases of the
Genres of interaction. The relatively fixed text-types that are associated with particular recurrent
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component to control not just a body of facts but a set of text-building skills, embedded in recurrent
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so on (Berek et al., 1995). Learning a genre or a profession requires
and manipulative Genres such as the conference paper, research paper, and academic writing, which
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function as a college undergraded involves learning the conventions of various academic
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order to become a competent member of a particular community. For example, learning to
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the categories of texts which a person has to learn to recognize, reproduce, and manipulate in
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Discourse analysis is concerned in how within and other communicative skills are acquired.
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of a particular language or variety or a particular combination of languages or varieties; people who all live or work in the same 'speech community,' 'discourse community' or 'community of practice'; and people engaged in the same linguistic activity. It is important to bear in mind, however, that any decision to study a group of people has the effect of creating a group of people. Humans are not born into groups to which they then always and invariably 'belong'; human identity and social organization are flexible, so that a particular individual orients to different identities, different sets of ideas, and different social activities at different times. Even relatively immutable facts about people such as their physical appearance or age can be relevant at some moments and irrelevant at others. The labels sociolinguists typically use in grouping people for study—labels such as 'Spanish speaker,' 'East Asian,' 'lower middle class,' and 'female'—can make social and linguistic categories seem more fixed and permanent than they are, and such labels may fail to correspond to any of the ways the people in question actually group themselves, when they do.

Failure to think carefully about which social and linguistic categories are relevant, and under what circumstances, to the individual people in whom we are interested, can make sociolinguists liable to misunderstand what is happening. It can also cause confusion and hostility, as people find themselves mislabeled and treated as if their behavior were entirely predictable. Like all other scholars, sociolinguists need to come to conclusions that are potentially generalizable across sets of people or situations, but doing this inevitably means describing people as cogs in a sociolinguistic machine. This deprives them of free will, an aspect of their humanity that many people especially value. Because of this, an important aspect of 'community responsibility' is to bear in mind that 'community' is always an abstraction, and that the object of study is ultimately a set of particular individuals with particular motivations and behaviors.

3. Community Members As Co-Workers
Because of the general shift in sociolinguistics from more social-scientific ways of explaining things to more ethnographic ones, it has become increasingly important for sociolinguists to find ways of eliciting the beliefs and perceptions of the people they study in addition to eliciting their behavior. This means that community members are acting as co-researchers in more ways.

Since 'insiders' who study their community thereby partly reposition themselves as outsiders and 'outsiders' acquire roles inside the community by virtue of studying it, the distinction between outsiders and insiders is never completely clear. It may be that in some cases the ideal researchers are themselves members of the community, since insiders have access to 'local knowledge' (Geertz 1973) and local resources in a way outsiders do not. An effective research team may, in other cases, include insiders and outsiders, with complementary orientations and skills.

In many cases, sociolinguists involve the people they study by using them as sources of validation, consulting with them via procedures sometimes called 'member checking.' In sociolinguistic work, this sometimes involves 'playback' or 'feedback' procedures in which tapes are played for the people who were recorded, or similar people, and they are asked what they think was happening and why.

Sometimes the people being studied have even more authoritative roles. Although research participants in sociolinguistic work are rarely (if ever) treated as the sole experts—we do not simply transcribe and publish their explanations of things—folk linguistic expertise is often explicitly drawn on, because sociolinguists have come to see that local ideas about language and local ways of attributing social meaning to linguistic phenomena cannot be predicted on the basis of larger social or linguistic patterns, and that access to local knowledge of this sort is crucial for understanding sociolinguistic processes. Sociolinguists have explored numerous ways of drawing out local knowledge, many borrowed from the participant observation techniques of sociocultural anthropology. They include, for example, paying increased attention to local talk about talk and other representations of speech, as in 'stylings,' parodies, and performances of various other kinds.

4. Uses of Research Findings
It was once thought that the purpose of scholarly research was to uncover the truth, in order to add to humanity's store of knowledge. Now that many sociolinguists are no longer convinced that there are absolute truths or that knowledge is a single ever-expanding inventory of scientific facts, new and challenging questions have arisen about the uses of research.

For one thing, we need to think in new ways about the nature and the distribution of expertise. It seems more and more important to many researchers to find systematic ways of incorporating community expertise into the process of scholarly inquiry. Researchers in some fields have adopted 'participatory' research practices that include ways of insuring that all participants in the research—researcher and community members alike—take part not just in data collection and analysis but also in theory-building. Such practices are not widely used in sociolinguistic work, in part because non-linguists' ideas about language—the idea that speakers of stigmatized dialects are stupid, for example, or the idea that there is a single correct way of talking—often strike
determine which sort of discourse will count as what genre in its particular context.

On his linguistic form and/or to be aesthetically appealing — formal features are not enough to

cultivate in folk that is "performative" (Blumen 1977) — discourse that is meant to focus attention

on particular, specific vocabulary, specific ways of framing and keying that seem to recur across

genres is "poetic" or perhaps more, whereas there are formal features (repetition,

rhyming, divisions into lines and stanzas, and so on) that suggest that perhaps in some

ways in which the ideas and myths have been transcribed obscured their many poetic qualities:

people like Will Hymas (1981) and William Buie (1981) begin to notice that the prose-like

Nahua American texts collected in the early part of the 20th century were prose narratives,

to remind themselves that gene distinctions are culturally relative. After years of assuming that

Linguists and anthropologists working with Nahua American discourse, for example, have had

The notion of genre works much less well for other traditions of discourse, however.

what to expect and how to interpret it.

system continues to work, acting as a sort of control between authors and their readers about

acceptable literary forms codified in Classical Latin remained relatively stable, this classification

of scholars in the West focused on the Western literary tradition, and as long as the set of

minhage, or "literary" (and the term itself, broad definition), the literary (primarily

by how they represent the world: the epic (primarily descriptive), the dramatic (primarily

literary studies, where it has been used to refer to conventional types of literary texts categorized

The French word "genre" means "kind". In English, the word has a long tradition of use in

Genre: Recurrent Forms, Recurrent Actions
Another new question about knowledge has to do with the role of social and political change in the process, which became a critical component of the 1950s and 1960s sociological literature. The sociological literature of the 1950s and 1960s, in fact, was characterized by a concern with the role of social and political change in the process, which became a critical component of the 1950s and 1960s sociological literature.

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The CAT attempts to parse a data stream.

Caution: The CAT will CACHE a data cache. Similar to the KG unit cache, but the object cache plays. Some of the better CAT games are: MOUSE is a killer app. This is pre-installed. Many owners use their system for...