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**Linguistic Society of America
Ethics Statement
May 2009**

This document is intended to serve as a basic ethical framework for linguists of all subdisciplines. We hope that linguists will find it a useful resource for indicating to local review bodies, funding agencies, potential research consultants, and others that they are professionally committed to carrying out their work in an ethical manner. The document is intentionally written to be highly general; the point is not to provide the sole or final voice on what counts as ethical practice, but to provide linguists with some guidance for making ethical choices. Overlap between this document and other principles and regulations is therefore inevitable. Redundancy—and even conflict—with other principles is welcome to the extent that it serves the broader aims of encouraging linguists to actively engage with the ethical issues that arise in the course of their professional activities and of fostering increased discussion of ethics within the discipline.

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1. Introduction.

Linguists work in a variety of settings and approach the study of language from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Each setting presents its own set of potential ethical dilemmas. It is the responsibility of linguists individually and collectively to anticipate ethical dilemmas and to avoid bringing harm to those with whom they work.

Some kinds of linguistic research fall under the purview of formal human subjects regulations. This document is not meant to replace formal ethics oversight; nor is it meant to provide an exhaustive code of conduct. Rather, it is meant to provide linguists working in all subdisciplines with a very general framework for making ethical choices.

2. Responsibility to individual research participants.

Research participants share their knowledge and often aspects of their lives with researchers. Even when a project focuses exclusively on the language and does not require institutional ethics review, linguists should recognize the collegial status of language consultants and respect their rights and wishes. Linguists should do everything in their power to ensure that their research poses no threat to the well-being of research participants.

- Research participants have the right to control whether their actions are recorded in such a way that they can be connected with their personal identity. They also have the right to control who will have access to the resulting data, with full knowledge of the potential consequences.
- Linguists are responsible for obtaining the informed consent of those who provide them with data (regardless of whether and how that consent is documented), for maintaining any expected confidentiality in storing data and reporting findings, and for ensuring that any individual's participation in their research is completely voluntary at every stage. Anonymous observations of public behavior, which often cannot involve consent, should include no information that could inadvertently identify individuals or,

where sensitive, the community.

- Linguists should carefully consider whether compensation of some kind is appropriate, be it remuneration for time and effort, or use of their knowledge and expertise to benefit participants or their communities.
- Where feasible, linguists should facilitate participants' access to their research results.

3. Responsibility to communities.

While acknowledging that what constitutes the relevant community is a complex issue, we urge linguists to consider how their research affects not only individual research participants, but also the wider community. In general, linguists should strive to determine what will be constructive for all those involved in a research encounter, taking into account the community's cultural norms and values.

Ideal frameworks for interaction with outside researchers vary depending on a community's particular culture and history. In many communities, responsibility for linguistic and cultural knowledge is viewed as corporate, so that individual community members are not in a position to consent to share materials with outsiders, and linguists must try to determine whether there are individuals who can legitimately represent the community in working out the terms of research. Some communities regard language, oral literature, and other forms of cultural knowledge as valuable intellectual property whose ownership should be respected by outsiders; in such cases linguists should comply with community wishes regarding access, archiving, and distribution of results. Other communities are eager to share their knowledge in the context of a long-term relationship of reciprocity and exchange. In all cases where the community has an investment in language research, the aims of an investigation should be clearly discussed with the community and community involvement sought from the earliest stages of project planning.

4. Responsibility to students and colleagues.

Linguists should model and promote ethical behavior in all their professional activities. They should strive to minimize harm to students, colleagues, and others over whom they hold power.

- Linguists should recognize and properly attribute the contributions of

students and colleagues to their research. They should compensate students fairly for their assistance.

- Linguists should strive to evaluate student work in a fair and timely manner.
- Gender, marital status, race, ethnic background, social class, political beliefs, disability, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, age, and other such distinctions should not be used as a basis for discrimination.
- Intimate relations between instructors and students may lead to exploitation and conflicts of interest. Instructors and students should avoid such involvement when an instructor is in any way responsible for a student's success.
- Linguists should ensure that their students receive instruction in the ethical practices appropriate for their field.

5. Responsibility to scholarship.

Linguists are collectively responsible for the reputation and progress of the discipline and should endeavor to maintain a high degree of professionalism in all aspects of their work.

- Linguists are subject to the standards of conduct found in other disciplines. They should practice honesty (e.g., by not plagiarizing or fabricating data) and carefully cite the original sources of ideas, descriptions, and data.
- Linguists conducting field research should do all they can to preserve opportunities for researchers who may follow them in the future.
- Linguists should make all reasonable efforts to preserve their original irreplaceable data and documentary materials.
- Linguists should strive to follow through on promises made in funded grant proposals and should acknowledge the support of sponsors.

6. Responsibility to the public.

Linguists have a responsibility to consider the social and political implications of their research.

- Linguists should make the results of their research available to the general public, and should endeavor to make the empirical bases and limitations of their research comprehensible to nonprofessionals.

- Linguists should give consideration to likely misinterpretations of their research findings, anticipate the damage they may cause, and make all reasonable effort to prevent this.

Acknowledgments.

In 2006 the Executive Committee of the Linguistic Society of America established an ad hoc Ethics Committee which was charged with the task of drafting new guidelines for the responsible conduct of linguistic research. Members of the committee were Claire Bower, Lise Dobrin, Penny Eckert, Ted Gibson, Jane Hill, Keith Johnson, Jack Martin, Philip Rubin, Susan Steele, and Sara Trechter. Monica Macaulay served as the committee's representative to the Executive Committee.

This ethics statement was drafted in early 2007 and revised in late 2008. It was influenced in part by the 1988 Statement of Ethics of the American Folklore Society and by the 1998 Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association.