

Sociolinguistic Field Methods

Class #1

Course Overview and Ethics

Sociolinguistic Fieldwork

- Understand both the structure and uses of the language of a group by documenting the vernacular they use with one another.

Observer's Paradox (Labov, 1972: 209)

“The aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed: yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation.”

This can be achieved by . . .

- developing questions/question modules that override the observer's paradox (e.g., danger of death)
- creating surrogates for everyday linguistic interaction (e.g., group interviews)
- reducing the social distance between fieldworker and interviewee (e.g., by using same race fieldworkers)

Ethics of Fieldwork

- The object of study and participants in the research process
- The separation of the roles and goals of researchers from those of the speech community participants
- The role of ethics committees in the negotiation of power relations between researchers and community members
- The place of researchers not as part of normal community interaction but as outsiders with rights and obligations

Research Ethics and Guidelines

- [LSA](#)
- [UC Davis Office of Research](#)
- IRB guidelines typically require:
 - anonymity of participants and place names
 - list of who has access to the data?
 - data management plans for longevity and storage
 - statement about public access (especially for externally funded projects)

NSF Criteria

- Intellectual Merit: The Intellectual Merit criterion encompasses the potential to advance knowledge
- Broader Impacts: The Broader Impacts criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes.

“Empowering Research”

- “Unequal partnership” (Rickford, 1997)
 - “What has sociolinguistics returned to the African American speech community?”
 - Representation of the AAVE speech community in research – both linguistically and culturally
 - Use sociolinguistic research to advance educational opportunities (dialect readers; Rickford’s more recent work with Rachel Jeantel)
 - LSA Institute symposium on Advancing African American Linguist(ic)s (July 6-7)
- Principle of Linguistic Gratitude (Wolfram, 1998; Wolfram et al., 2008)
 - Returning favors to and/or sharing expertise and knowledge with host research communities
 - Ownership of materials gathered in communities