

## **Research with Human Subjects**

Members who do research with human subjects have expressed concern that the new Federal Policy on the Protection of the Human Subjects does not always apply to linguistic research. They asked the Executive Committee to develop a statement expressing this sentiment to accompany project proposals. In response, the following statement was prepared by the Social and Political Concerns Committee and adopted by the LSA Executive Committee at its May 1992 meeting in Washington, DC.

### **Human Subjects in Linguistic Research**

Studies of a human language often depend upon a continuing relation with speakers of the language. Such a relation comes to be defined as much by the speakers as by the linguist. Their patterns of life govern when work can be done. Their expectations, and those of their community, shape what is to become the results of the work. Understanding of the nature of linguistic inquiry grows in the course of the relationship. Sometimes lifelong friendships are established.

Such work must be conducted with respect for those who participate, with sensitivity as to their well being, and with concern for consequences of publication or sharing of results.

Certain considerations may make the study of a language different from much research in the sciences and social sciences. One asks many questions in discovering the features of the language, of a kind the collaborator learns to expect and even anticipate. They are seldom of a sort that can be disturbing or injurious. Moreover, fruitful work may depend upon the linguist learning and observing the norms of politeness and friendship expected by those with whom he or she is talking. Those who participate in such a work often do so with pride in their command of their language and may wish to be known for their contribution. Not to disclose their names would do them a disservice. Native Americans sometimes justly criticize earlier work with their language for not having adequately proclaimed the contributions of the Native Americans themselves. Fairness to speakers of a language is very much a matter of understanding their viewpoint, and what is appropriate in one situation may not be in another.

Such considerations make it difficult to apply general rules in a mechanical way.