



# The British Association for Applied Linguistics

## Recommendations on Good Practice in Applied Linguistics

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# Introduction

Applied linguistics is both:

- an approach to understanding language issues in the real world, drawing on theory and empirical analysis;
- an interdisciplinary area of study, in which linguistics is combined with issues, methods and perspectives drawn from other disciplines.

In the course of their work, which includes teaching, research, administration and consultancy, applied linguists often face a variety of conflicting interests and competing obligations. This document aims to assist applied linguists in their awareness and response to these dilemmas and the choices they entail. To do so, it points to a range of principles and values. Some, such as the commitment to equal opportunities and to fair employment practices, are general in their scope. Others are more specific to academic work and to applied linguistics. Ethical priorities are the central concern throughout this text, but it leans more to discussion in terms of ‘could’ than prescription in terms of ‘must’.

Most of the document is organised around the different work relationships that applied linguists engage in, and within these, it offers a checklist of important issues, cross-referring to other guidelines where these may be of value. This document isn’t designed as a set of criteria for professional accreditation in applied linguistics, and it doesn’t provide any recipes for professional decision-making. In a changing climate of teaching and research, its suggestions are intended to help applied linguists to maintain high standards and to respond flexibly to new opportunities, acting in the spirit of good equal opportunities practice and showing due respect to all participants, to the values of truth, fairness and open democracy, and to the integrity of applied linguistics as a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry.

## 1 Relationships in research

Research in applied linguistics takes a number of different forms, and these have a substantial influence on the way that relationships are conducted within the research process. The types of relationship between investigators, their colleagues, their informants and their sponsors that are central to one style of inquiry can be less relevant for another. As a result, recommendations about good practice in research have to be prefaced with some discussion of the different forms that inquiry in applied linguistics can take.

1.1 It is notoriously difficult to identify categorical differences between ‘traditional’ research, ‘evaluation’, ‘action research’, ‘participatory research’ and ‘consultancy’. Terminology is frequently inconsistent, there is flux in the academic status associated with different approaches, and actual projects are often hybrid. However, investigations can often be broadly distinguished in terms of:

- the priority given to debate with peers, with informants and with sponsors. In

consultancy and in participatory or action research, the ideas and perceptions of informants and sponsors can be given as much weight as those of academic colleagues, whereas in traditional research - for example the PhD - central importance is given to dialogue *within* the scholarly community.

- control over publication of results. The right to publish stands as the cornerstone of academic freedom, and should only be relinquished under the most exceptional circumstances. In traditional academic inquiry, the researcher alone decides on the form in which findings would best be disseminated, and retains full ownership over them. But in some other kinds of inquiry, the form and timing of publication is sometimes negotiated with informants and/or sponsors. In commercial consultancy for example, the sponsor may want to retain some advantage over its competitors, and in some circumstances, it is reasonable to delay publication for a short period.
- time taken for analysis and writing up. Where investigations are intended to feed directly into the management of institutions, reports often have to be produced quite rapidly. In contrast, in traditional research, the applied linguist generally has much more time for reflection and analysis prior to the production of a final report.

1.2 Consultancy, evaluation, action research, participatory research and traditional research are all potentially valuable. Indeed, it would be easy to argue that this diversity in forms of inquiry is an important factor contributing to the vitality of applied linguistics as whole. However, this diversity can become a problem if different kinds of research are confused with one another. Government, commerce and other bodies often seek the assistance of academic research because of the authority generated by its traditional independence. It would be wrong if this were claimed for work in which a disproportionate amount of the final shaping rested either with sponsors or with informants. Because of the risk of this confusion, it is essential to be absolutely clear about the conditions governing the production of a piece of work.

## 2 Responsibilities to informants

The term 'informants' is used to refer to those people from whom information or data is elicited or collected in some way. Responsibilities and relations with informants will sometimes vary according to the type of inquiry carried out. In traditional approaches to applied linguistics research, the role of an informant is clear-cut. In some approaches, however, their role may be more ambiguous, such as in the case of collaborative research with professionals, action research or evaluation. In such cases, alternative terms, such as 'co-researchers' or 'participants' may be more appropriate. All of the 'responsibilities to informants' described above apply to people who are more actively involved as participants in research.

Occasionally dilemmas and tensions may arise, such as, for example, between confidentiality and the public's right to know, or between anonymity and the safety of other people. In such cases, responsibilities and relationships will need to be negotiated case by case. The points below generally apply to all Informants, whatever their social position, but particular care needs to be

taken with those who have less power to negotiate their rights.

- 2.1 **General responsibility to informants.** Applied linguists should respect the rights, interests, sensitivities, and privacy of their informants. It is important to try to anticipate any harmful effects or disruptions to informants' lives and environment, and to avoid any stress, undue intrusion, and real or perceived exploitation. Researchers have a responsibility to be sensitive to cultural, religious, gender, age and other differences: when trying to assess the potential impact of their work, they may need to seek guidance from members of the informants' own communities. In certain types of contract research, respect for informants cannot be guaranteed, and in these cases, researchers should consider carefully whether they should continue with the project.
- 2.2 **Obtaining informed consent.** Relationships with informants should be founded on trust and openness. Nevertheless, the idea of informed consent is increasingly recognized as a complex one. Informants, for example, are rarely familiar with the nature of academic activities such as publication or conference presentations, making it difficult for them to give fully informed consent to the use of data. Despite this, researchers should endeavour to provide sufficient information about all aspects of the research that might reasonably be expected to affect informants' willingness to participate. The information given at the outset of a project should cover the objectives of the research, its possible consequences, and issues of confidentiality and data security. When informants differ from the researcher in the social groups they belong to, it is worth seeking guidance on social, cultural, religious and other practices which might affect relationships and the willingness to participate. In cases where the research continues over a long period, the informed consent obtained at the start of the project may no longer be adequate, and consent may need to be renegotiated. Researchers should try to obtain the real consent of children and of adults with impairments in understanding.
- 2.3 **Respecting a person's decision not to participate.** Informants have a right to refuse to participate in research. But applied linguists need to be aware that the power relations between themselves and their potential informants can sometimes be inadvertently misused to pressurise people to participate. It is also important to respect an informant's wish to withdraw from the study, particularly if it is not conducted in the way explicitly agreed in advance.
- 2.4 **Confidentiality and anonymity.** Informants have the right to remain anonymous. Their confidentiality should be respected, and an attempt made to anticipate potential threats to both anonymity and confidentiality (e.g. by anonymising the data, making it secure, and sometimes even destroying it). But it is important to let informants know that it is not always possible to conceal identities completely, and that anonymity can sometimes be compromised unintentionally. Recognition of this should inform their consent. In some cases, such as participatory or collaborative research with professionals, anonymity may be impossible (e.g. joint research involving a university academic and a teacher/researcher who wishes to be acknowledged). In such cases, implications for other participants (e.g. a teacher's students and colleagues) should be carefully considered. In all cases, researchers should be aware of the provisions of the Data Protection Act (1998)

and the Freedom of Information Act (2000) (for more information on both acts see <http://www.ico.gov.uk> or your university information officer or equivalent).

2.5 **Deception and covert research.** This is an area of particular concern in applied linguistics. Covert research and deliberate deception are unacceptable to the extent that they violate the principle of informed consent and the right to privacy. However, in some research - concerned for example with phonological variation and pragmatic variation in naturally occurring speech - there are compelling methodological reasons for informants not being fully informed about the precise objectives of the research. In such cases, defensible options would be to:

- withhold the specific objectives of the research without deliberately misleading or giving false information (for example, informing doctors and patients that the research concerned the structure or progress of doctor-patients interviews without specifying that the aim was to study pause phenomena as an index of power);
- ask informants to consent to being deceived at some unspecified time in the future, on the grounds that the research could not be done otherwise. After the event, informants should then give their permission for the data, to be used;
- (if there are no methodological alternatives) present the objectives of the research to informants immediately after the data has been collected, guaranteeing anonymity if consent is given and destroying the data if it is withheld.

A distinction is sometimes made between deception and distraction. In contrast to the former, distraction is generally accepted as ethical, and it can be illustrated either in, for example, the introduction of multiple activities in a psycholinguistic experiment to prevent informants monitoring themselves, or alternatively, in situations of participation observation, in which informants come to accept the researcher as one of the community.

Observation in public places is a particularly problematic issue. If observations or recordings are made of the public at large, it is not possible to gain informed consent from everyone. However, post-hoc consent should be negotiated if the researcher is challenged by a member of the public.

A useful criterion by which to judge the acceptability of research is to anticipate or elicit, post hoc, the reaction of informants when they are told about the precise objectives of the study. If anger or other strong reactions are likely or expressed, then such data collection is inappropriate.

2.6 **Consulting informants on completion of the research.** Wherever possible, final project reports should be made available in an accessible form to informants, and informants should have the right to comment on them. Accessible forms may include more costly versions in several languages or video reports in BSL.

2.7 **Balanced participation.** The practical consequences of the kinds of inquiry often

designated action research, evaluation and consultancy, are usually much more immediate than they are in traditional research, affecting the distribution of power and resources in more obvious ways. In situations like this, where (a) participants have a significant degree of control over the research process, and (b) the political stakes are quite high, the notion of academic independence needs to be reformulated. In setting the agenda, in accessing and analysing the data, and in writing up the findings, the applied linguist may be happy to relinquish the autonomy entailed in traditional research, but she/he should take steps to avoid uncritically partisan alignment with any one interest group. In addition to the responsibilities outlined in 2.1 to 2.6, a number of checks and balances should be built into the research process to prevent it turning into advertising or propaganda:

- investigators should attend to a wide variety of perspectives on the issue, to the diverse claims made about it, to its context and history;
- no party should have privileged access to the data; the right to wholly determine the focus of the inquiry; sole access to project reports; or a unilateral veto over their contents;
- all participants should have the right to comment on the fairness, relevance and accuracy of project reports;
- all major interest groups should be represented on steering groups or management committees.

These recommendations draw on Norris (1992), which contains a number of other useful suggestions.

In consultancy, action research and evaluation, the project's sponsors also often operate as participants. Section 6 contains further discussion about relationships with sponsors.

2.8 **Research with children.** All the points above apply to research carried out with children as well as adults, but particular care may be needed with certain aspects of research when working with children. These include:

- It is possible for even young children to be involved effectively in the planning, conduct and dissemination of research. Care is needed in providing explanations and consulting at all stages of research, including consultation about the outcomes of research;
- **Informed consent** may be obtained even from young children, but researchers need to spend time ensuring children understand, to a degree commensurate with their capacities and interests, what they are agreeing to when they give consent;
- For children under 16, consent also needs to be obtained from parents or other adults acting *in loco parentis*;

- Children may be in a relatively powerless position vis à vis researchers and other adults: it is important that care is taken to ensure they do not feel under undue pressure to participate in or continue with research; it is also important not to exploit children's enthusiasm, and to ensure they do not undertake activities that may be against their own interests.

Researchers planning to work with children may be required by their institution, or other participating institutions, to obtain Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance - see <http://www.crb.gov.uk/>.

For an example of published guidelines see National Children's Bureau (undated). Other resources include Alderson and Morrow (2004); and Hill (2005).

2.9 **Internet research.** Online discourse provides certain challenges to the conduct of research, particularly with respect to **informed consent** and **confidentiality**. Opinions may differ on the extent to which different forms of online discourse are in the public domain, and this will affect decisions on the requirement for, and the nature of, consent and confidentiality.

Published guidelines suggest that, in reaching a decision on consent, researchers need to consider the venue being researched, any site policy on research and informants' expectations. In the case of an open-access site, where contributions are publicly archived, and informants might reasonably be expected to regard their contributions as public, individual consent may not be required. In other cases it normally would be required.

Informed consent may be difficult in areas such as chat rooms or MUDs where there is shifting participation (so that consent would need constant renegotiation) and where seeking consent itself disrupts group activity and may be greeted with hostility. Such difficulties may mean the venue cannot be researched. As an alternative, researchers sometimes seek permission from moderators or list-owners, or they may set up their own chatroom in which participants agree to take part in research.

In order to maintain confidentiality, normal practice is to anonymise both the venue and individual participants. In the case of individuals anonymity usually extends both to real names and online aliases or pseudonyms, where used. However, while anonymity is the default position for research participants even on public sites, in the case of certain texts – e.g. home pages, blogs, literary or artful texts – writers may see themselves as authors who should be formally acknowledged by the name used online.

For guidelines on online research, see Ess and the Association of Internet Researchers (2002), and a personal list by Bruckman (2002). Herring (1996) discusses ethical issues in linguistic research.

### 3 Responsibilities to colleagues

Self-interest and personal factors should not be allowed to interfere with a commitment to the production and dissemination of knowledge in applied linguistics, and interaction with colleagues should contribute to a positive working environment. When they are acting as employers, applied linguists have a duty to implement fair practices and to promote equal opportunities in appointments, appraisal and promotion.

3.1 **Referring to the work of others.** Applied linguists should not knowingly misrepresent the work of others. They should never present other people's work as their own; they should acknowledge in full all those who contributed to their research and publications; and they should clearly identify and reference any material which comes from other authors' publications or from personal communications.

3.2.1 **Reviews and references.** Applied linguists are involved in a wide range of review processes. They review books, book proposals, manuscripts, and research grant applications, and they are involved in the accreditation of courses, the examination of theses, the writing of references, and in appraisal and promotion procedures. There is general responsibility to provide an honest evaluation of the work in question. More specifically, it is important to:

- avoid conflicts of interest. It is not good practice to review work when there is a personal connection with its author;
- protect confidentiality. Confidential material, reviews and personal references should not be discussed with colleagues unless there is a *good professional* reason for doing so;
- refrain from drawing on the ideas in the unpublished manuscripts or articles being reviewed;
- supply requested references or reviews promptly;
- encourage practices which favour equality of opportunity (e.g. anonymity for both reviewer and reviewed).

3.3 **Distribution of work.** In departments or groups where responsibilities are shared, it is important to *try* to ensure that work is distributed fairly. In higher education, academics frequently have the three responsibilities of teaching, administration and research. The distribution of involvement with each of these activities should be worked out through careful and explicit processes of negotiation.

3.4 **Negotiating roles and responsibilities.** When working in collaborative or team research with other researchers, research assistants, interpreters, clerical staff or students, applied linguists should make everyone's ethical and professional obligations clear. Care should be taken to clarify the roles, rights and obligations of team members in relation to:



- the division of labour and responsibilities;
- workload;
- access and rights in data and fieldnotes;
- access to travel and conference expenses;
- publication;
- co-authorship in publication.

3.5 **Working in other countries.** When working away from one's own locality, it is important to consider the interests of local scholars and researchers. In locations away from the UK, matters such as the disparity of resources or access to publications may need to be handled with sensitivity. The status of 'visiting expert' can also be problematic, although seeking the active involvement of local applied linguists may help to avoid this.

3.6 **Applied linguists as employers.** When employing other staff, it is important to ensure that all employees are properly informed of the terms and conditions of their employment. The potential for casualisation in both teaching and research can lead to an increasing reliance on part-time and contract staff (including interpreters and transcribers) who together constitute a particularly vulnerable group. Care should be taken not to underpay part-time staff or to use either them or secretarial staff for duties for which they are neither adequately qualified or paid. Attention should be paid to the career development of all such staff participating in a project.

3.7 **Safety at work.** Applied linguists share responsibility for the safety of their colleagues in the conduct of their research. Safety issues may relate to, amongst other things, provision of suitable workspaces, workload, stress, field visits.

## 4 Responsibilities to students

Students of applied linguistics have diverse backgrounds. Many come from outside the UK, significant numbers have come through 'non-traditional' academic routes, and there are a great many mature students who bring different kinds of professional experience to their study. Applied linguists need to be sensitive to this variation in their course recruitment, course planning, teaching and assessment. It is important to take account of equal opportunities issues, to be alert to issues arising from inequalities of power between teachers and students, and to ensure that students are treated on the basis of their abilities and potential regardless of their gender, race, religion, sexuality, physical disability, family circumstances or other irrelevant factors.

- 4.1 **Student recruitment.** When students are being recruited, they need proper information on the nature and content of the course or programme in applied linguistics; the assumptions made about previous knowledge and experience, including language proficiency; the level and type of study required; methods of assessment; and, where relevant, appeals procedures. If the needs of potential students would be better suited on another course elsewhere, it is important to point this out to them. There should be clear criteria for the selection of students, and although teaching provision obviously has a major role to play, entry standards and admission requirements should be such as to maintain the institution's academic standards and to ensure a high success rate among students.
- 4.2 **Resourcing.** Given current pressures to take on an increasing number of students, there is a danger that resources will not keep pace with recruitment. Every effort should be made to ensure that courses in applied linguistics are adequately resourced in terms of staffing, accommodation, materials and equipment, access to libraries and other facilities. With a broader intake, it may also be necessary to build in continuing support - support in academic writing for example - for students with specific requirements.
- 4.3 **Course design, materials and methodology.** It is good practice to develop a variety of teaching approaches which are sensitive to the range of student backgrounds. Course materials should also take account of equal opportunity issues in the way they represent people and events. As applied linguistics research has amply demonstrated, face to face interaction often perpetrates quite subtle forms of unintended bias and discrimination: it is important to avoid these in applied linguistics teaching. Tutors should be aware of the possible impact of recent legislation, including the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001).
- 4.4 **Assessment and records.** Assessment methods should be developed that take account of students' differing backgrounds and academic needs, as well as the requirements of applied linguistics itself. Care should be taken to ensure that assessment is fair, students should be informed regularly about their progress, and assessment should be based on criteria that are as explicit as possible. Records kept on students should be available to those that they refer to. Personal information about students, including formal records, should be handled in confidence.
- 4.5 **Course evaluation.** Courses should be evaluated by both staff and students. If it is to be done properly, time needs to be set aside specifically for this.
- 4.6 **International students.** The points above apply to all students, whether home based or overseas, and it is important not to assume that the difficulties faced by students from outside the UK are necessarily greater in every respect. However, irrespective of purely academic questions, studying abroad generally requires many domestic rearrangements, and this can be stressful. International students are likely to need special help in settling in, and they may well have additional pastoral needs throughout their period of study. In addition to comprehensive information on academic matters, potential students also need clear financial and practical information prior to deciding to study overseas (information

on course fees, likely cost of living, accommodation, travel arrangements etc). Applied linguists involved in teaching students from outside the UK should consult UKCOSA (the United Kingdom Council for Overseas Student Affairs), which has a series of publications on good practice that are listed at the end of these recommendations. It is also important to consult the guidelines provided in ECS 1995 and CVCP/CDP 1992.

- 4.7 **Students for whom English is an additional language.** British universities are recruiting increasing numbers of international students, many of whom English as an additional language. This situation is particularly apparent in applied linguistics, such as in postgraduate TESOL programmes, for example. Care must be taken to ensure a realistic assessment is made of English proficiency needed to participate fully in any course (e.g. based on IELTS or TOEFL tests). The teaching, materials, assessment and support provided during a course should be sensitive to the needs of such students. As applied linguistics research has shown, a high level of general English may not correspond to a similar level of academic English and specific support may be necessary in the area of academic writing in particular.
- 4.8 **International collaboration.** There is an increasing trend for British universities to offer courses and even campuses overseas, in collaboration with partner universities around the world. Care should be taken that such arrangements are equitable, offering students the same standard of education as they would receive in the UK.
- 4.8 **Research students.** Most of the issues identified above apply to research students as well as to students on taught courses. But beyond these, research students have a number of more specific requirements. They need a working environment that is conducive to research, a programme tailored to their individual needs, and perhaps above all, a supervisor that they can engage in high quality dialogue. The ESRC's *Postgraduate Training Guidelines* (2004) make useful recommendations that are relevant to all research students, not simply those with ESRC funding, and they also contain specific suggestions for research training in applied linguistics (as well as in research ethics). The National Postgraduate Committee (NPC) is concerned with many aspects of postgraduate well-being, and has produced guidelines on postgraduate research, taught postgraduate courses and on the employment of postgraduate students as teachers. For research supervisors, it is worth attending supervisor training courses, where these are available.
- 4.9 **Students and staff research.** If an applied linguist draws on a student's research, or on a student's contribution to a larger project, this should always be fully acknowledged in publications, including through co-authorship where appropriate. Applied linguists should avoid exploiting their students' work as a means of enhancing their own publications, through, for example, automatically adding their name to students' work. Where students are needed as research informants, they should be invited to participate without coercion. Unless volunteering for it freely, students should be remunerated or compensated in other ways if there is a substantial amount of work involved. The nature of their involvement should be properly explained to students, in line with the recommendations on good practice with informants contained in section 2 above.

## 5. Responsibilities to Applied Linguistics

In general, applied linguists should strive to maintain the integrity of applied linguistic enquiry, the freedom to research and study, and the freedom to publish and disseminate the results of their research. Because of the widely held popular view that “everyone knows about language, it’s just common sense”, the public standing of applied linguistics can sometimes be quite vulnerable. So as well as ensuring high standards in their own academic conduct, applied linguists need to be fully explicit about their own professionalism.

The integrity and reputation of applied linguistics partly depends on the way in which knowledge is produced and circulated inside the profession.

- 5.1 As representatives of a scholarly community, applied linguists have a duty to keep up with research in the field. Since applied linguistics is interdisciplinary, it is also important to keep in touch with relevant developments in associated disciplines. Given the vast amount of research and writing that appears every year, however, applied linguists should also be aware of the limitations of their knowledge.
- 5.2 It is essential to avoid the fabrication, falsification or misrepresentation of evidence, data, findings or conclusions.
- 5.3 All aspects of research should be reported in enough detail to allow other applied linguists to understand and interpret them. Within the conditions of any research project, it is also worth considering ways in which the data collected could be made available to others working in the area.
- 5.4 It is important to make and maintain links with the international community of applied linguists. While it may be unavoidable that there is bias towards work that is both in English and *about* English in a British association, applied linguists should also try to ensure that proper weight is given in both teaching and research to work published in and about other languages. Applied linguists should be sensitive to issues of international academic equity and power relating to the economic circumstances of different countries. This sensitivity might include, for example, avoidance of exploitation of colleagues from low income countries, or support for the international participation of such colleagues.
- 5.5 To maintain the historical integrity of the area, it is necessary to draw on and critique past traditions of applied linguistics. Without in any way discouraging innovation, this knowledge needs to be passed on to newcomers to the field.
- 5.6 Applied linguists have a responsibility to support newcomers to the field (students, research assistants, colleagues from other fields) to become active contributors to the community through open engagement, fair dealing and support for career development.

The standing of applied linguistics is also influenced by the way in which applied linguists

communicate with a wider audience. Applied linguists regularly interact with a range of non-specialists, and sections 2, 6 and 8 provide some quite detailed discussion about ways of developing and maintaining good relationships with the general public, with informants and with sponsors.

## 6 Relationships with sponsors

Sponsors are involved in several kinds of applied linguistic work. They can be involved, for example, in research contracts where the researcher has the idea and obtains funding for it, perhaps from the ESRC or from Leverhulme. Sometimes sponsors themselves define the research issue and seek expert assistance from outside, and this can happen with a private sector company or a government department (or again the ESRC). Alternatively, the funder might require teaching/training provision, or specialist expertise for projects overseas. The discussion in Section 1 of variation in the relationships in research refers to sponsors as well as to informants.

Applied linguists should be careful not to enter into any contract with sponsors which compromises the kinds of professional ethic outlined in this document.

6.1 Their responsibilities to sponsors includes:

- honesty about their qualifications, capabilities and aims in undertaking a piece of work. As appropriate, applied linguists should provide full details of the methodology they propose, and they should be ready, if necessary, to redirect potential sponsors to other scholars. Although the time required to carry out a piece of work cannot always be predicted accurately, it is important not to under- or over-price for it.
- clear, regular and accurate accounts of their work, with a frequency agreed in advance. Investigators should be accountable for the funds spent, but they should never misrepresent data or findings to enhance commercial potential.

6.2 Applied linguists may not be able to compel agencies to adopt specific contracts or codes of practice, but they should expect:

- their professional expertise to be respected;
- their work to be properly credited, without any misrepresentation of their views;
- sponsors to act with integrity, fairness, and regard for equal opportunities.

6.3 Contracts with sponsors raise issues that are too numerous and too complex to be treated adequately in the present document. These include: the composition of steering committees; lines of communication; the ownership of data and findings; publication rights; contract termination. Applied linguists need to be careful about the terms on which they accept contracts for investigation, as well as being very clear about the amount of

autonomy which they will be able to exercise. Pettigrew (1992) contains a worrying account of the way in which research contracts are have become increasingly restrictive. Before signing a contract, applied linguists would be well-advised to seek expert advice, and to refer to the detailed suggestions in, for example, CVCP (1992) *Sponsored University Research: Recommendations and Guidance on Contract Issues*, as well as ESRC (1993b) *Forging Research Partnerships: Guidelines on Collaboration between Social Science and Business*.

## **7 The relationship between applied linguists and their own institutions**

Although it may only be in exceptional circumstances that applied linguists can disclaim all personal responsibility, the institutions that they work for can significantly help or hinder them in their efforts to adhere to the values and principles outlined in this document. This document cannot stipulate the duties of institutions, but there are certain conditions that applied linguists should look for in employment.

- 7.1 Institutions should have their own codes of good practice, covering all aspects of their relationship with employees. These should facilitate conduct in accordance with the recommendations presented here. These recommendations draw extensively on the guidelines offered by other academic bodies, and in doing so, they reflect a significant level of consensus across the social sciences.
- 7.2 Institutions should not require applied linguists to undertake work which runs counter to the norms of good professional practice, and specifically in relation to work funded externally:
  - they should not compel applied linguists to engage in particular contract projects;
  - they should provide their academic staff with opportunities to supplement externally funded contract work with independent inquiry and with training to upgrade their teaching and research skills. This is important to prevent contract work becoming an arid piecemeal activity, and it is also likely to lead to greater productivity and effectiveness in contract work in the medium to long term;
  - in the event of a disagreement arising between the agency funding a project and the investigator engaged on it, the institution should give its full support in resolving the dispute.
- 7.3 Institutions should have suitable procedures (e.g. ethics committees) for the ethical scrutiny of research. Such procedures should be supportive, educative, dialogic, proportionate and not unnecessarily bureaucratic. Applied linguists should not see

approval by an ethics committee as absolving them from further ethical consideration as their research progresses.

## 8 Responsibilities to the public

Language issues pervade many aspects of public and everyday life. This gives applied linguists special as well as general responsibilities towards members of the public and the wider society. It is important to try to promote confidence in applied linguistic work, without exaggerating the accuracy or explanatory power of its findings. Where research uses public money, there is a duty to provide an account of how and why funds have been spent, and of what has been achieved.

- 8.1 **Awareness of the impact of one's work.** In setting up research, consideration should be given to conflicting interests. In principle, greater access to well founded information should serve rather than threaten the interests of society. But it is necessary to consider the effects of research on all groups within society, including those that are not directly involved. Information can be misconstrued or misused. Applied linguists should try to anticipate likely misinterpretations, and the damage they might cause, and counteract them when they occur.
- 8.2 **Advising on public bodies.** A specific type of responsibility to the public arises when applied linguists are asked to contribute their expertise to public bodies by becoming members of committees, working parties or review bodies. Such work is an important arena for the dissemination and application of language research. However, it can lead to involvement in the formulation of policy which conflicts with the individual's expert opinions and with the general principles of applied linguistics. In such cases, it may be appropriate to instigate the production of a document or a minority report which presents a dissenting view, to resign from the committee, or act as a 'whistle blower'. Any applied linguist placed in a dilemma of this kind could consult the BAAL Executive Committee, to discuss whether the Association could support them in some way.
- 8.3 **Dissemination and communication.** It is important to consider disseminating one's work both in specialist publications and in more diverse and accessible formats. Relations with the mass media require particularly careful thought. Publicity for applied linguistics should not be overblown or self-seeking, and expert commentaries that give credence to tendentious material should be avoided. The ESRC's (1993) *Pressing Home Your Findings: Media Guidelines for ESRC Researchers* provides researchers with detailed suggestions on how to form a productive relationship with the media.

## Afterword

The first edition of these Recommendations (1994) was drafted by Ben Rampton (coordinator), Joanna Channell, Pauline Rea-Dickins, Celia Roberts and Joan Swann. Comments on a first draft were provided by Meriel Bloor, Christopher Brumfit, Tony Burgess, Debbie Cameron, Ron

Carter, Romy Clark, Paul Meara, Ulrike Meinhof, May Pettigrew, Antoinette Renouf, Mukul Saxena, Phil Scholfield, Brian Street, Mike Stubbs, John Trim and Janet White.

Comments on the first version persuaded the drafting group to aim for a checklist of recommendations rather than a definitive code of prescriptions. The intention has been to facilitate discussion about ethics rather than to draw up legislation. These recommendations will need to change and develop through continuing debate and in the light of the changing conditions in which applied linguists work. It is hoped that BAAL members will be active in the periodic revision and updating of this text.

Revisions for this second edition were drafted by Richard Barwell and Joan Swann. Comments and suggestions were provided by Graham Hodson Turner, Julia Gillen and Janet Maybin, Sarah North.

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