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, and an interdisciplinary area of study, in which linguistics is combined with methods and perspectives drawn from other disciplines.

In the course of their work, which may include teaching, research, scholarship, 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 of and response to some of the dilemmas they may face and the choices these dilemmas entail. To do so, it points to a range of principles and values. Some, such as the commitment to equal opportunities, 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'.

The document is not designed as a set of criteria for professional accreditation in applied linguistics and does not aim to exhaust the discussion around these issues, but it provides points for reflection and engagement with several aspects of professional practice. 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. Most of this document is organised around the different work relationships and responsibilities with which applied linguists engage, including informants (2.), the researchers themselves (3.), academic colleagues (4.), students (5.), and applied linguistics as a field (6.). Section 7. offers some reflections on research conducted in collaboration with external organisations and groups, followed by responsibilities to our own institutions (8.) and the public more broadly (9.). It should be noted these reflections on ethical conduct may go beyond the requirements of a research ethics application and review process, which largely focuses on appropriate protections for research participants.

## Guide to using this document

Within each section, an outline of central issues is offered, cross-referencing other relevant documents where these topics may be of value. At the end of each section, the questions posed serve as points for reflection throughout research decision-making processes. In some sections, specific case studies are also provided, offering an insight into how guidelines are put into practice in real-life research contexts. Some suggestions for further reading are also listed, should the reader wish to explore particular issues that are raised in this document in more detail. The recommendations in this document are intended for use alongside ethics and good practice requirements and guidelines from specific institutions and funders. While recognising the international relevance of this document, for pragmatic reasons we primarily address a UK-based reader and urge researchers based outside the UK to consult relevant local regulations and guidelines alongside this guide.

# 1. Research Relationships

When we undertake research, there are certain key decisions that need to be made, regarding how, where and when the investigation will be carried out, and how the results will be shared. In certain cases, these decisions don't lie with the researcher alone, and this section aims to highlight some of the contexts in which others may have a legitimate right to influence them.

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/external partners 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.

It is notoriously difficult to identify categorical differences between types of research such as action research, participatory research, ethnographic research, theoretical research, and related forms of activity such as evaluation and consultancy. Terminology is frequently inconsistent; there is flux in the academic status associated with different approaches, and actual research projects are often hybrid. However, investigations can often be broadly distinguished in terms of:

- **Participation.** The priority given to engagement with peers, with informants and with sponsors/external partners. All research engages in dialogue with existing ideas from the scholarly community to differing degrees. In other areas, for example, linguistic ethnography, participatory or action research, the ideas and perceptions of informants and sponsors/external partners can be given as much weight, or sometimes even more weight, as those of academic colleagues.
- **Publication and dissemination.** The amount of control given to the researcher over the publication of results can also vary according to research type. For many research projects, the right to publish stands as the cornerstone of academic freedom, but this is not to say it will always be straightforward or that findings should not be discussed prior to publication. 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 negotiated with informants and/or sponsors. In commercial consultancy for example, the sponsor may wish to retain some advantage over its competitors, and in some circumstances, it is reasonable to delay publication for a short period. Co-writing and co-publishing on research work with non-academic partners have also become increasingly common and can be an effective and ethical means of agreeing and disseminating research findings in a way that all parties are comfortable with. In some particularly sensitive consultancy settings, such as where the linguist acts as an expert witness, there may be no right to publish this initial work in an academic setting, although agreement can sometimes be sought separately for later academic research.

- **Timescales.** Another way in which research can be distinguished is in the 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. By contrast, in doctoral research, the applied linguist generally has much more time for reflection and analysis prior to the production of a final report.

There are a wide variety of research approaches under the umbrella of ‘applied linguistics’, such as action research, participatory research, ethnographic research and theoretical research and this diversity in forms of inquiry contributes to the vitality of applied linguistics as a whole. It can also involve a variety of partnerships. Government, commerce and other bodies often seek the assistance of academic research because of the authority generated by its traditional independence. It would be unacceptable if this were claimed for work in which a disproportionate amount of the final shaping rested either with sponsors or with informants. It is essential to be clear about the conditions governing the production of a piece of work.

**Planning research - Key Questions**

- What type of work is planned?
- Who is involved in the research design? Does their involvement have any implications for academic freedom?
- What are the timescales involved?
- Who will be in control of the data?
- Where will the data be stored – both during the project and afterwards?
- Who will be in control of the publication of results?
- Are the conditions associated with the investigation clear?

# 2. Responsibilities to Informants

In some areas of applied linguistics, the term 'informants' is used to refer to those people from whom information or data are elicited or collected in some way. Responsibilities to and relations with informants will sometimes vary according to the type of inquiry carried out. In some approaches to applied linguistics research, the role of an informant is clear-cut, particularly in, for example, questionnaires and surveys, or where language testing and psycholinguistic experiments are conducted. In other approaches, such as collaborative or participatory research or some forms of internet research, their role may be more ambiguous. In such cases, alternative terms, such as 'co-researchers', 'participants' or 'data subjects' may be more appropriate.

Occasionally, dilemmas and tensions may arise, for example, between confidentiality and the public's right to knowledge, or between anonymity and the safety of other people. In such cases, responsibilities and relationships need to be considered 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 responsibilities to informants

Applied linguists should respect the rights, interests, sensitivities, privacy and autonomy of their informants, including instances in which access rights are not so clear-cut. Examples of this include easily accessible internet sites, although there may be exceptional circumstances in which the usual rights to privacy are superseded by the nature of the data (see section 2.9 for further discussion). It is important to try to anticipate any harmful effects or disruptions to informants' lives and environment from the research, and to mitigate any stress, undue intrusion, and real or perceived exploitation. Some ethical frameworks ask researchers to consider how a research design might personally benefit informants, possibly through opportunities to learn and/or reflect on their context. Researchers also 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 research, however, respect for informants cannot be guaranteed and a degree of criticality may be necessary. Researchers should consider these types of situation carefully.

## 2.2. Informed consent

Informed consent requires researchers to ensure that, when participants give their formal consent, they are aware of the nature of the research, how it will be conducted and how the data they provide will be used and shared. Conventionally, the information provided to participants stipulates how and when data will be collected, how much data will be sampled, how data is (re)presented and the research purposes for which it will be used. It should also include information about whether the data will be anonymised or not, how it will be protected from theft and misuse, where the data might end up in the future and how present or future researchers might use it. Typically, this information is provided in the form of a written ‘participant information sheet’, along with a consent form for informants to sign, indicating their agreement. In some circumstances, it may be more appropriate to provide this information and gain consent orally and this must usually be agreed by an ethics committee in advance of the study. When informants belong to different socio-cultural groups from the researcher(s), it is worth seeking guidance on social, cultural, religious and other practices which might affect relationships and their willingness to participate or sign a consent form. Information sheets may also need to be translated into other languages. Specific consideration is given to research with children in section 2.10.

It is good practice to consider the different ways in which data might be used over the life of a project and inform participants from the outset. Ideally these uses can be anticipated in advance, but, in some cases where the research continues over a long period, informed consent obtained at the start of the project may no longer be adequate. In such cases, consent may need to be renegotiated, as long as informants have given their permission to be contacted. For example, where video clips might be used in training materials or other purposes that were not originally discussed, it may be necessary to seek additional permissions.

Informed consent is often considered a cornerstone of ethical research, and the foundation upon which trust and openness between researchers and informants are built. Nevertheless, the notion of informed consent is increasingly recognised as a complex one. Informants, for example, may not be familiar with the nature of academic activities such as publications or conference presentations, making it difficult for them to give fully informed consent to the use of data. In some cases, it may not be appropriate, or even possible, to obtain informed consent. For example, with some types of internet research, it might not be clear exactly who informants are, how to contact them or whether they fall into a ‘vulnerable’ category (Markham and Buchanan, 2015). There are also circumstances, such as investigating criminal interactions online, where it is not appropriate or safe to seek the consent of the original authors. In such circumstances, decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis, with the support of a strong rationale that considers informants’ rights and sensitivities (Markham and Buchanan, 2015). These decisions should also be taken with reference to a relevant ethics committee.

## 2.3. Withdrawing consent and respecting refusal

Informants have a right to refuse to participate in research. However, applied linguists need to be aware that the power relations between themselves and their potential informants can sometimes be inadvertently misused to put pressure on people to participate. It is also important to respect an informant’s wish to withdraw from the study. One example of good practice in interview-based research, for example, is to send participants a transcription of the interview and ask them whether there’s anything they would like to redact or correct. In cases where research is about or with children or adults with impairments in understanding, researchers should try to obtain their consent in an appropriate manner, ensuring that participant information sheets and consent forms are written in a way they will understand.

## 2.4. Anonymity and confidentiality

Informants generally have the right to remain anonymous (and in most cases should be kept anonymous). The researcher must attempt to anticipate potential threats to both anonymity (for example, by removing names, locations and information contained in the data that might render informants identifiable) and confidentiality (for example, by making data secure). This involves not only obscuring the identities of the immediate participants but also other individuals and sometimes organisations who might be mentioned in the text. Nevertheless, since linguistic data is nearly always produced by individual human subjects, anonymisation is a complex task. Where human subjects are to be audio or video recorded, and this raw data is integral to the analysis, it can be difficult to fully anonymise, although techniques such as changing the pitch of voices and providing outline views of the video can assist in obscuring identities. It is therefore important to let informants know the level of anonymisation that is to take place, that it is not always possible to conceal identities completely, and that anonymity can sometimes be compromised unintentionally. Recognition of these facts should inform their consent. In some cases, such as participatory or collaborative research and some forms of internet research, anonymity may be impossible or unfavourable, as where an internet site's regulations state that data should not be altered, or where an author, or joint practitioner/researcher, wishes to be acknowledged. In such cases, specific regulatory frameworks governing research sites, and/or the autonomy of individual informants, must be negotiated. However, where an informant's right to anonymity is waived, implications for other participants (such as the students and colleagues of a named research participant) should be carefully considered.

## 2.5. Data protection and GDPR

In all cases, researchers should be aware of the provisions of legislation such as – in the UK context - the European Union (EU) General Data Protection Regulation (2018) and the UK Freedom of Information Act (2000) (for more information on both see https://ico.org.uk/ or talk to a data or information officer at your organisation). The key principles of GDPR are as follows:

- Lawfulness, fairness and transparency
- Purpose limitation
- Data minimisation
- Accuracy
- Storage limitation
- Integrity and confidentiality (security)
- Accountability

There is also a 'research exemption' for collecting and storing certain types of data, but it is worth discussing this with the data and information experts at your organisation. A particularly important principle of GDPR to consider before undertaking applied linguistics research is data minimisation. At all times, personal data collection, storage and use must be kept at the minimum level to allow the research to take place. While the collection of personal data may be important for the research, researchers must not collect more personal data than needed, and only keep it for as long as necessary. It is useful to note that, under GDPR, recordings of people speaking are considered personal data and should be treated with the appropriate level of care when storing and sharing with other researchers. For some particularly sensitive types of data collection and processing, a 'Data Protection Impact Assessment' (DPIA) is required, either by the party providing the data to the researcher or by the academic organisation collecting and sharing the data with others. The Information Commissioner's Office provide an outline of when a DPIA is needed (Information Commissioner's Office, 2020) as well as a template of what should be included, but you should seek advice from an information officer at your organisation to check if this is likely to be required for your research.

## 2.6. Deception and covert research

Deception and covert research are areas of particular concern in applied linguistics. Deliberate deception and covert research are unacceptable to the extent that they violate the principle of informed consent and the right to privacy. However, in some research, which is concerned, for example, with phonological or pragmatic variation in naturally occurring speech, there are compelling methodological reasons for informants not to be fully informed about the precise objectives of research. In such cases, one defensible option would be to withhold the specific objectives of the research without deliberately misleading or giving false information (for example, by informing doctors and patients that the research concerns the structure or progress of doctor-patients interviews without specifying that the aim is to study pause phenomena as an index of power). Another approach would be to 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 be fully informed and confirm their consent before the data can be used. If there are no methodological alternatives, a final option is to debrief informants immediately after the data have been collected, guaranteeing anonymity if consent is given and destroying the data if it is withheld. A strong rationale for this option must be presented to a research ethics committee.

A distinction is sometimes made between deception and distraction. In contrast with the former, distraction is generally accepted as ethical, and it can be illustrated in, for example, the introduction of multiple activities in a psycholinguistic experiment to prevent informants monitoring themselves, or in situations of participant observation, in which informants come to accept the researcher as one of the community. However, observation in open and accessible spaces, including those found online, can be problematic. If observations or recordings are made of the public at large, it is not always possible to gain informed consent from everyone included. Again, decisions must be made as to the appropriateness of different forms of covert research, with careful attention to the rights and sensitivities of individual informants, and these decisions must be supported by a strong rationale. A degree of reflexivity, together with consultation with relevant parties (for example, a site manager if working with an external organisation), can help researchers to judge the acceptability of such research.

In some examples of ethnographic research or the collection of spoken and multimodal corpora, researchers put up notices in locations where their research is being conducted and/or where recordings are taking place. These notices provide contact details of the researchers and information on how individuals can request that the recordings (or parts thereof) in which they are featured are removed and/or destroyed. If this approach is to be used in your own research, part of the procedure for gaining ethical approval will be for the wording of such notices to be checked by the ethics committee.

There are settings where gaining consent from informants is inappropriate. This is particularly the case in some forensic linguistic research, such as analysing potentially criminal interactions on the dark web. Such research usually operates on a strict policy of anonymisation, with potential victims or offenders heavily obscured, sometimes even before the data is provided to the researcher. Researchers should be mindful of the fact that, where online data is concerned, it is often possible to locate an original text through a search engine, questioning the extent to which anonymity can be wholly preserved. Publication of research of this nature is particularly ethically complex as the data subjects were not aware that their language would be analysed in this manner. Researchers in these settings should follow protocols set out by their institution and any external parties.

## 2.7. Consulting participants on publishing data

Typically, informants have a right to access their own personal data, i.e. interviews of themselves, videos, transcriptions etc., and also to withdraw the data if they are no longer happy for it to be used. However, once the data is fully anonymised, it may no longer be possible to locate an individual informant's contribution and at this point the same legal right to access does not apply. It is good practice to provide informants with a timescale, indicating the point at which the data will be anonymised and they will no longer be able to request its removal. Informants retain the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process up to the point that datasets and/or results are anonymised and published. Deleting data from, for example, complex linguistic corpora can be a challenge if the withdrawal occurs during the latter stages of the project, so keeping the informants well informed of the research processes (and their implications) is vital from the outset, to help mitigate such challenges.

In most contexts, wherever possible, final project reports (and datasets) should be made available to participants in an accessible form, although researchers should be mindful of the fact that disclosing potentially sensitive, compromising or critical information can lead to a variety of consequences. This is not to say that this information should not be released, just that the researcher should consider any consequences in advance of publishing reports (and datasets). It is good practice to offer participants the opportunity to be informed of the outcome of the research, noting that this means you will have to keep their contact details and that you'll do so separately from the data they have provided.

## 2.8. Participation and independence

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, or (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, applied linguists may be happy to relinquish some autonomy, but they should take steps to avoid uncritical partisan alignment with any one interest group. In addition to the responsibilities outlined above, a number of checks and balances should be built into the research process to prevent it turning into advertising or propaganda. Researchers may wish to refer to the Research Councils UK (2017) for further guidelines relating to good research conduct. Further considerations are also given in section 7 on relationships with sponsors and partners.

## 2.9. Online data

Collecting and analysing data sourced online can present particular challenges for upholding the principles and practices explored above. For example, researchers who collect large amounts of freely available, non-elicited online data, such as tweets from thousands of open Twitter accounts, may be unsure whether they are dealing with ‘participants’ at all, and subsequently, whether and how content creators should be contacted, consented, or be granted anonymity. Further, content may not always be ‘owned’ by authors, and so legal and ethical obligations to various platforms and corporations may also need to be considered. These considerations may need to be revisited at different stages of a research project, as platforms update their terms and conditions and content may get deleted or withdrawn. Ultimately, applied linguists will need to have a good understanding of the research context, including its regulations, the way users interact with it, who users might be, and their expectations, in order to appreciate whether and how it is ethical, appropriate, and indeed legal, to use data sourced online. This kind of case-by-case ‘process approach’ is flexible and responsive to emergent and developing forms of social interaction, and the reflective and dialogical role of the researcher in teasing out what is appropriate in different contexts (see Markham and Buchanan, 2015 and franzke et al. 2020, for further guidelines and discussion). The case study at the end of this section illustrates some of the complexities of ethical decision-making when exploring social media data. In particular, it shows that basing ethical decisions on fixed notions of what is ‘public’ or ‘private’ is not always sufficient, and is no substitute for personal, in-depth understanding and insight about the research context.

## 2.10. Working with children

All of the points made so far in relation to informants apply to research carried out with children as well as adults; it is possible for even young children to be involved effectively in the planning, conduct and dissemination of research. However, particular care may be needed with certain aspects of research when working with children, for example, 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. Researchers should be aware, however, that in some cases, particularly with internet research, it may not be easy to determine informants' ages.

Children may be in a relatively powerless position vis-à-vis researchers and other adults: it is important that care is taken to be clear that participation is not related to their educational grading and assessment and ensure they do not feel 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 to obtain clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in England and Wales, from Disclosure Scotland when in Scotland, or from AccessNI when working in Northern Ireland. For an example of published guidelines, relevant specifically to England and Wales, see National Children's Bureau (Shaw et al. 2011). Other resources include Alderson and Morrow (2004) and Hill (2005).

## 2.11. Diverse communities and participants

Finally, investigators who work within linguistically and/or culturally diverse communities may find themselves researching individuals whose understanding of the status and power of academics and/or public sector researchers is quite different from their own. Here, too, there is a risk of exploitation as conflicting assumptions undermine the very notion of informed consent, and may result in undue deference or personal disclosure, and/or false assumptions about the benefits that accrue from participation. Providing carefully formulated information sheets, consent forms and (possibly) audio-recorded information to potential participants must play a crucial role in mitigating these risks. Given that applied linguists work in a range of languages other than just English, the practices of translating such documents into multiple languages, using accessible and jargon-free writing, and providing translators to explain the process of gaining consent are often crucial to the data collection and should be planned for in advance.

**Case Study: Analysing Discussion Forum Data - Mumsnet Talk**

**Jai MacKenzie**

**Aims and objectives:** To consider how women explore the options that are available to them, as parents in contemporary society, through conversations that take place on the internet.

**Data and methods:** This project utilised data from Mumsnet Talk, the discussion forum of a popular UK parenting website. This is an active forum that is accessible to anyone with an internet connection. Through prolonged observation of the site and purposive sampling, I collected a set of 50 Mumsnet Talk threads in the summer of 2014. Two of these threads were selected for close, micro-linguistic analysis.

**Main ethical challenges:** The key questions faced from the outset were: 1) Was it ethical to collect and analyse this data? 2) Did I need consent from contributors (and/or Mumsnet) to use their posts? and 3) If so, how I should go about obtaining that consent?

**Overcoming challenges:** When I started this research, I saw it as an unproblematically 'public' forum, and did not really think of contributors as 'participants' who had particular rights to the words they had posted online. However, my qualitative, semi-ethnographic approach, and the understanding of the Mumsnet community that I gained as a result, led me to feel uneasy with this stance. I discovered, for example, that anonymity was an extremely strong value for Mumsnet users; that they often had a strong sense that their 'intended public' (boyd, 2010) was other Mumsnet users, *not* the general public, and that their interactions often took on a private, intimate style. I decided, as a result, to ask for permission (from individual users, as well as from gatekeepers at Mumsnet) to use any posts that I would analyse in detail or quote, contacting them through the site's direct messaging function. This felt like a risky move – I was aware that some might not appreciate being contacted out of the blue, and could refuse permission. I was right on both counts. But these issues were small in number, and overall my interactions with Mumsnet users were extremely valuable for furthering my understanding of this online community.

**<u>Case Study: Analysing a Twitter discussion around a television debate</u>**
**Paul Baker**

**Aims and objectives:** To identify discourses surrounding the topic of poverty on the internet platform Twitter, based on discussion of a television debate.

**Data and methods:** Using the social data platform DataSift, a corpus of 81,000 tweets, all containing the hashtag of the televised debate, was collected via Twitter. All tweets were publicly available. The corpus was analysed with AntConc in order to identify keywords (words that are unusually frequent in the corpus when compared against a reference corpus).

**Main ethical challenges:** 1) It is difficult to contact the authors of all the tweets to ask for permission to include their tweet(s) in the corpus and even if that was done, many authors would not respond or give permission, resulting in an unrepresentative corpus. 2) It is difficult to anonymise this data as the content of a tweet can be typed into a search engine which will retrieve the original tweet along with information about its user. 3) Some of the authors advocated criminal behaviour in their tweets (e.g. violence towards people). Should the researchers quote these tweets, report such authors to the police, alert Twitter so they are banned from the site or try to protect these tweeters' identities so the research does not result in them becoming the target of a subsequent hate campaign and/or police interest?

**Overcoming challenges:** It was infeasible to ask permission to include all 81,000 tweets in a corpus and as they were all posted publicly and there was no intention to share the corpus with anyone, this was deemed an acceptable, if not ideal, state of affairs. The majority of the tweets were used to obtain frequency information so were not quoted in the research. Twenty-nine tweets were quoted for illustrative purposes although Twitter handles were not included. Additionally, the top 10 most retweeted tweets were quoted with Twitter handles as they were from journalists or institutions, acting in a work-based capacity. Tweets advocating violent behaviour were not quoted. After discussion it was decided not to involve the police due to the fact that it could not be known whether the people creating the tweets were children or from another vulnerable group, and these tweets appeared to be flippant rather than serious. It was left up to individuals involved in the project as to whether they wanted to flag particular tweets to Twitter once the project had ended.

**Key Questions**

- How are the informants' roles construed? For example, do they hold a more or less powerful position than the researcher(s)? If so, how will you ensure participation is voluntary and non-detrimental?
- How are the rights, interests, sensitivities, privacy and autonomy of the informants taken into account?
- Has informed consent been obtained (including from children and adults with impairments in understanding), where appropriate, and does it cover the full duration of the project?
- Have informants' rights not to participate been made explicit?
- Has every effort been made, where appropriate, to protect informants' anonymity and the confidentiality of the data?
- Where anonymity may be compromised or partial, have the conditions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Freedom of Information Act or comparable legislation been taken into account?
- Does the research require covert collection of data or deception of any kind? If so, have the options to minimise negative effects on informants been considered?
- Can distraction be used as a way to collect more reliable data?
- Are informants likely to react negatively when told about the precise objectives of the

study?

- Will final project reports be accessible to participants?
- Who benefits from the research? How is this assessed prior to and throughout the research process?
- Is the balance of power over the research process in keeping with academic integrity? Have checks and balances been built into the research process?
- Has any party requested 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?
- Have all major interest groups been represented on steering groups or management committees?
- Where children and cognitively impaired adults are concerned, has time been spent ensuring they understand, to a degree commensurate with their capacities and interests, what they are agreeing to when they give consent?
- For children under 16, has consent also been obtained from parents or other adults acting in loco parentis?
- Have researchers avoided exploiting children's enthusiasm or placing undue pressure on them to participate or continue to participate?
- Have all the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearances – or comparable checks - been obtained?

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# 3. Responsibilities to Researchers

An essential element of good practice is safeguarding the well-being of the researcher. While much applied linguistics research involves very little risk to the researcher, some studies have the potential to pose emotional, mental, and/or physical challenges. Institutions and project leads also have a duty of care to researchers working in these complex settings, ensuring that they have adequate access to advice, support and training on data collection and fieldwork.

## 3.1 Distressing data

Any data collection and analysis have the potential to bring up a distressing topic or experience for a researcher, even studies conducted in apparently mundane settings, and the considerations below may be valuable for any research project. Nevertheless, some types of data and research contexts require careful consideration from the outset. Collecting data that contain offensive or shocking content, or content that are created to oppose social norms, can be upsetting and emotionally demanding, for example. Research into online extremism and linguistic data collected from ‘unlikeable subjects’ (Rüdiger and Dayter, 2017), as well as data from certain criminal settings, can take a toll on the emotional welfare of the researcher(s) involved. For applied linguists who are eliciting or analysing information from informants recollecting traumatic or sad experiences, measures also need to be taken to ensure the researchers themselves are not adversely affected by the accounts being shared. To determine the challenges which research data may present, applied linguists may want to carry out a personal risk assessment as part of their initial research design, as well as a plan for self-care, using some of the suggestions outlined below. These can outline any potential risks to well-being and can help to identify available support systems. A risk assessment might be offered by the researcher’s institution and should be carried out with the potential risks to the participants/subjects of the research in mind.

It is important that applied linguists involved in researching unsettling or distressing data can implement effective resilience strategies, such as taking regular breaks and limiting the amount of data analysed each day. Good ‘work hygiene’, in which the researcher does not ‘take home’ disturbing data or work on it to the exclusion of less challenging activities, can be a helpful practice, as well as ensuring that the researcher works within a supportive team or environment. Accessing available support and reaching out to others is important. This may involve attending counselling services or well-being seminars offered by the institution or contacting others in the field who are involved in similar research and can talk through issues (including the Special Interest Groups, SIGs, affiliated with BAAL). It is an important part of the duty of care by the university or institution to provide support or counselling, in some circumstances with ongoing maintenance checks from a psychologist, who has the ability to rest researchers from a project if deemed necessary, as is the practice in some areas of forensic linguistics.

When working on distressing or offensive data, researchers have a responsibility to protect colleagues by using privacy filters on computer screens or setting up a workstation which prevents others from seeing such material. This consideration also extends to presenting data in public settings, such as conferences and in seminars, where providing content warnings and redacting data which is likely to cause particular distress should be considered.

## 3.2 Risks of harm

For applied linguists who are researching extreme or prejudiced discourses, particularly those collected from online sources, safeguarding considerations should also include how the data is accessed. If possible, it is advisable for the researcher to access sensitive or extreme websites via their institution and limit the risk of their personal IP address being identified online. Using a Virtual Private Network (VPN) can also offer some protection if data need to be collected via a personal computer. While the promotion of research on social media platforms such as Twitter is often encouraged, particularly at conferences or when publishing papers, careful consideration also needs to be given to what is shared in public. Applied linguists may find it necessary to balance the value of disseminating their research with protecting themselves from trolling and possible backlash. A range of strategies can be used to protect researchers who are keen to promote their work online, such as: making sure effective privacy settings are activated on social media platforms; checking what content is being shared and if its context is clearly visible; presenting work as objectively as possible; and assessing the value of using certain visuals.

Researchers should also bear in mind that the relationship between researcher and participant can sometimes be complex, particularly in cases where the researcher spends long periods of time with participants (e.g. ethnographic or longitudinal studies). While the researcher must ensure that they do not place undue expectations on the participants' time, the reverse can also be true. Participants may have their own agenda for engaging in the research process or may develop unrealistic expectations about their relationship with the researcher. Such cases ought to be handled sensitively and discussed with research programme supervisors where possible.

When conducting fieldwork or data collection, researchers might occasionally become privy to information that appears to disclose illegal activity or dangers to others. In some circumstances, there may be a legal obligation to inform relevant authorities and you should consult your university's ethical and legal guidance. Even when there is no legal obligation to report an activity, researchers may still find themselves in possession of information about acts that could potentially harm the participants themselves, specific third parties or the public. This is a complex area which can raise some difficult issues, and researchers are advised to discuss the issues and seek advice from appropriate colleagues (including supervisor, line manager, head of unit, legal services), if they feel that there is a potential need to break participant confidentiality. Some of the issues presented in this section are explored in the case study below.

**<u>Case Study: Investigating dark web interactions of online sex offenders</u>**

**Tim Grant**

**Aims and objectives:** The dark web has been an under researched area of the internet and there is significant social benefit to be gained by understanding how these online communities operate, and whether the interactions can be analysed to reduce risks to the public.

**Data and methods:** Dark web fora can be accessed either directly, or through data purchases from specialised security companies that operate web crawlers to supply data to law enforcement. The format of the data is very similar to other internet fora and can comprise discussion groups, bulletin boards and peer-to-peer interactions.

**Main ethical challenges:** There are considerable research challenges in this domain. Two main challenges are 1) Not only will the subjects of the research not be asked for consent the aim of the research will negatively affect their interests. 2) The content of the data includes sexually explicit discussions of child abuse and sexual abuse of adults and working with this data can negatively affect researcher well-being.

**Overcoming challenges:** The issues of consent and that of harming the interests of the contributors to the fora were presented to university ethics review board for discussion and approval, at which guidelines were drawn up involving deliberate or accidental identification of individuals in the fora, and for reporting actionable intelligence to the appropriate authorities.

The issue of researcher well-being was tackled by putting in place a variety of provisions, these included limiting the number of days in a week that analysis of this data set could be undertaken by any individual researcher, ensuring that the analysis was done at a work computer rather than at home (but in a context where the work could not be accidentally overlooked by other researchers) and set up a peer group of researchers involved in working with disturbing data. Most significantly though was providing psychological support to the researchers, through a specialist psychologist, who engaged researchers in preliminary discussions providing strategies and tips for dealing with the data and then ongoing support through regular meetings. Either the psychologist or researcher's themselves were empowered to indicate that a temporary or permanent break from the data would be useful and that should such a break be taken best efforts would be made to ensure different work could be assigned to ensure that there was no detriment to the researchers' career.

**Key Questions**

- What are the potential welfare challenges associated with the identification and collection of data?
- What resilience strategies need to be implemented to protect stakeholders' mental health?
- Have support systems been identified?
- If necessary, are systems in place to limit personal identification online?
- Has the researcher considered their relevant university's code of research conduct and governance structure surrounding research ethics?
- Does the proposed research meet the ethics requirements stipulated by the university?
- Has a strategy for continuous ethical review as the project progresses been considered?

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# 4. Responsibilities to Colleagues

Relations within scholarly communities, which are characterised by their emphasis on academic autonomy, peer review and intellectual self-governance, distinguish academic work from that of other institutions and organisations. Applied linguists take up a wide range of activities that involve working with colleagues. For example, they write books, book proposals, manuscripts and research grant applications, and review these same documents. They accredit courses, examine theses, write references, and are involved in appraisal and promotion procedures. When working with colleagues in such circumstances, applied linguists have a responsibility for ethical decision-making that meets if not exceeds legislated standards for equity and human rights practices. Self-interest and personal factors should not interfere with a commitment to the production and dissemination of knowledge in applied linguistics and interactions with colleagues should contribute to a positive working culture. The following provides key considerations.

## 4.1 Referring to and attributing academic work

Applied linguists should not knowingly misrepresent the work of others, or present other people's work as their own. They should acknowledge in full all those who contributed to their research and publications, clearly identifying and referencing any material which comes from other publications or from personal communications. If contributors have directly helped to undertake the research, it is often appropriate to offer co-authorship in an academic publication; in other cases, an acknowledgement is sufficient. Ideally, this should be negotiated before the writing process begins, along with the order that individual contributors will be listed in publications. In some scientific fields, for example, the principal investigator (PI) is typically listed last, with the main research assistant listed first, but this is not always the case in the humanities and social sciences, where the PI is often listed first. In other instances, contributors may be listed in order of how much they contributed to the writing and/or research.

## 4.2 Reviews and references

When reviewing the work of others, there is a general responsibility to provide honest, thoughtful and respectful evaluations that will support fellow researchers and colleagues in continuing to develop and refine their ideas and/or institutional practices. It is important to protect confidentiality (unless there is a valid professional reason for not doing so), and to ensure that that others' ideas presented in publications and proposals are fully acknowledged: never take ideas encountered when reviewing and pass them off as your own (this is effectively a form of plagiarism). It is also important to encourage practices that favour equality of opportunity. Ensuring that both reviewer and reviewed remain anonymous is a typical default position for this process, but in some instances, this is not completely possible. Where the identity of the reviewed is obvious or cannot be anonymised, it can be appropriate to identify the reviewer as well, to level things out. Requested references or reviews should be provided promptly, where possible.

## 4.3 Roles in collaborative research

All involved in collaborative or team research - other researchers, research assistants, interpreters, clerical staff or students - must be clear about their ethical and professional responsibilities. Researchers are responsible for communicating these responsibilities and for making every effort to ensure ethical and professional obligations are fulfilled. This includes but is not limited to, the roles, rights and obligations of team members to have access and rights in data and field notes, access to travel and conference funding, publication and co-authorship in publication. In departments or groups where responsibilities are shared, it is important to try to ensure that work is distributed fairly. Researchers also share responsibility for safety issues in the conduct of their research, which may relate to, amongst other things, considering manageable workloads, mitigating potential causes of stress (see section 3), providing suitable workspaces and organising safe field visits.

## 4.4 Responsibilities 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. 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 or administration staff, or to ask them to do duties for which they are neither adequately qualified nor paid. Attention should be paid to the career development of all such staff participating in a project.

## 4.5 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 researchers to navigate potential pitfalls, and to navigate the typical approaches to research and expectations associated with it. Such issues may also be pertinent when collaborating online with colleagues based in other countries. The guidelines offered here are not necessarily transferable to other contexts, so it is important to understand how the land lies before making any assumptions about common and/or good practice as defined in that given context.

**Key Questions**

- Has the work of others been accurately represented and appropriately referenced?
- Have colleagues' informal as well as formal contributions to research and publications been acknowledged?
- Before agreeing to a review, have potential conflicts of interest been considered? Do review practices favour equality of opportunity?
- Have steps been taken to ensure the confidentiality of the review process?
- Have the contents of material not yet in the public domain been kept confidential (unless

used with the express permission of its author)? Does a review support the author(s) in continuing to refine and develop their ideas?

- Are research and/or non-research responsibilities distributed fairly, through a transparent process, among colleagues and departmental staff?
- Have ethical and/or professional responsibilities been clearly communicated to all research team members?
- Have reasonable steps been taken to monitor the research team's performance of its ethical and/or professional responsibilities?
- Are terms and conditions of employment for staff appropriate for the work they are assigned and the maintenance of high standards for human rights, workplace safety and workplace well-being?
- Have the conditions, norms and sensitivities of the local context been considered and thoughtfully engaged with in work conducted beyond one's home institution or country of residence?

# 5. Responsibilities to Students

Students of applied linguistics have diverse backgrounds. They have distinct learning experiences, have been immersed in a range of learning cultures, and may have experienced formal education in a range of national contexts. Many Master's and Doctoral students have experiences outside the academy and 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 matters 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, age, race, religion, ethnicity, place of origin, sexuality, physical disability, family circumstances or other factors linked to personal identities (see protected characteristics listed in the UK Equality Act, 2010).

## 5.1 Course design and teaching methods

It is good to develop a variety of teaching and assessment approaches that are sensitive to a range of student backgrounds. It is particularly important that course materials take account of equal opportunities issues, internationalisation and decolonisation in the way they represent people, identities 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. It is important for assessment to be fair on the person being assessed, based on criteria that are as explicit as possible, and for students to be informed regularly about their progress, with records of their achievements being made readily available to them. The Advance HE's (2014) *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* and Universities UK's (2015) *Good Practice Guide on Student Mental Well-being in Higher Education* are useful guiding principles here.

Tutors should also be aware of the possible impact of recent legislation, including (in the UK) the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), the subsequent Disability Discrimination (NI) Order (2006) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), as well as the values and ethos underpinning documents such as the Universities UK's (2015) *Good Practice Guide on Student Mental Well-being in Higher Education*.

It is good practice to ensure that all course materials are in an accessible form. This means ensuring that documentation is available online and formatted for screen-readers, using alt-text written descriptions for diagrams and tables, using Sans Serif fonts such as Arial or Calibri which are easier to read, and taking care around use of colour and contrast. Accessibility checkers are built into Word and PowerPoint and some online teaching platforms such as Blackboard and Moodle. Do what is possible to ensure that course readings are available in e-book form or digitally scanned in an accessible way, although take heed of any copyright restrictions involved in this process (your institutional library/library representative will provide some advice on this). It is important that each individual with specific needs is asked what they need, and personalised adjustments made accordingly. For example, when teaching students with visual, auditory or cognitive impairments, some may prefer to have accessible versions of materials made available in advance of each session (although others may not).

## 5.2 Educational provision

Some groups of students may face particular challenges when embarking on academic programmes. For example, international students are likely to need support with settling in, as relocating to study abroad can be time-consuming and stressful. There are considerations for part-time students, mature student and students with disabilities. These additional pastoral needs may continue throughout their period of study. In addition to comprehensive information on academic matters, potential students also need clear financial and practical information before deciding to study overseas (such as information on course fees, likely cost of living, accommodation and travel arrangements). Advance HE and the United Kingdom Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) provide useful publications and workshops on good practice in this regard. Additionally, every effort needs to be made to ensure students, both international and home, possess the English language capacities to participate fully in their programme (note that the politics of visas and the testing industry can complicate this process). 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. It is considered good practice in applied linguistics to not use terms like ‘native speaker’ and ‘native-like’ when evaluating individuals’ capability or competency in a language. These terms are considered offensive as they perpetuate stereotypes, pointing to an agreed/preferred ‘standard’, a single variant of a language to which all speakers should aspire (and be judged against - for further discussions relevant to the ‘native speaker’ debate, see Davies, 2003; Bonfiglio, 2010; Lowe and Pinner, 2016).

Finally, research students are likely to 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 a supervisor with whom they can engage in high-quality dialogue. The Economic and Social Research Council’s (2015) *Postgraduate Training Guidelines* are relevant to all research students, not simply those with ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) funding, and provide a useful reference point for assessing a department or faculty’s current provisions for postgraduate students.

## 5.3 Student 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. It is unethical for anyone to exploit their students’ work as a means of enhancing their own publications, through, for example, automatically adding their name to students’ work. It is legitimate to add their name to their students’ work if they have made a substantial contribution to undertaking the research itself and/or writing up the work, although this needs to be discussed on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, it can often be advantageous for the student to collaborate on a publication with a more experienced mentor/supervisor as it may increase the quality and readership of the work.

Where students are needed as research informants, they should be invited to participate without coercion and, for some time-consuming contributions, should be remunerated or otherwise compensated (if resources and/or the institution allows). The nature of their involvement should be properly explained to students, in line with the recommendations of section 2, above.

**Key Questions**

- Has the diversity of students' needs, interests and capacities been considered in the design of the module and/or programme?
- Have issues associated with equality of opportunity and the potential inequalities arising from power imbalances been reflected upon and evaluated in relation to teaching designs, policies and supports?
- Are the available resources for teaching and learning appropriate for the demands of the programme? Do they address the ongoing needs of the student population?
- Are the facilities (e.g. buildings, lecture theatres, computer labs), resources and materials accessible to all?
- Do teaching approaches and materials employ a variety of techniques, strategies and activities? Has the diversity of knowledge been considered? Whose knowledge is being shared?
- Do assessments take into account students' differing backgrounds and academic needs? Are students informed regularly of their progress?
- Is the confidentiality and security of students' academic records adequately maintained? Are students aware that they have access to such records and of the processes for gaining access?
- Are the standards for students' educational experience equitable regardless of location and/or delivery mode?
- Are the unique needs of groups such as international students, research students and students for whom English is an additional language considered and reflected in the programme design and supports?
- Has the student's capacity to operate effectively in the English language, as required for their study, been realistically set and assessed prior to accepting students into a programme?
- Are the unique contributions of research students recognised in publications, presentations and other forms of dissemination? Are opportunities for student involvement clearly presented as optional and is the appropriate compensation awarded where applicable?

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# 6. Responsibilities to Applied Linguistics

Applied linguistics is a diverse field, often involving work with stakeholders within and outside academia, in different disciplines, and in different parts of the world. Applied linguists should strive to maintain the integrity of 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. Strong views on language are also presented and debated in the media (including social media), and applied linguists often need to position themselves in public fora. It is important not to compromise the standards of academic conduct in this process, 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 ways in which knowledge is produced and circulated inside and outside the profession. As representatives of a scholarly community, applied linguists have a duty to keep up with research in the field. Applied linguistics is an interdisciplinary field; this involves keeping in touch with relevant developments in associated disciplines. Given the vast amount of research and writing that appears every year, however, applied linguists should be aware of the limitations of their knowledge and position themselves in their own selected areas of expertise.

In line with the UK Research Integrity Office's (2009) *Code of Practice for Research* and RCUK (2017) *Policy and Guidelines*, it is essential and expected that researchers do not fabricate, falsify or misrepresent evidence, data, findings or conclusions. All aspects of research should be reported in enough detail to allow other applied linguists to understand and interpret the findings as appropriate. Within the conditions of any research project and area, it is also worth considering ways in which datasets could be made available to others working in the area. The Concordat on Open Research Data (2016), developed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Research Councils UK (RCUK), Universities UK and the Wellcome Trust, with input from a range of universities and organisations, provides a series of principles for sharing data, supported by UKRI and other research funders in the UK. Increasingly, therefore, funders require that data collected or generated in the course of a project be preserved and made publicly available in digital repositories, where no ethical, legal or commercial restrictions would prevent this. Often these repositories will be provided by your university or institution, but there are also national repositories provided by research funders. Researchers must usually, along with an ethics application, now submit a 'Data Management Plan', setting out the type of data they will be collecting, how it will be stored and made secure and, where possible, shared beyond the life of a project. Additionally, it is recommended that the data which underpin a research publication be made freely available and a 'Data Access Statement' provided to direct the reader to its location. These principles support the applied linguistics and wider research community in that they enable methodologies and claims made in a publication to be verifiable and the data reusable for other research purposes to which it may be applicable. The principles set out in the Concordat on Open Research Data (2016) do acknowledge that it is not always possible to share data fully, and this can particularly be the case in linguistics, where it can be difficult to render video, audio recordings or textual data sufficiently anonymous to be able to share the original raw dataset in full in a way which would not breach participant confidentiality and GDPR guidance (as set out in section 2). It is also recognised that researchers who go to the effort of generating original research data should have a reasonable right of exclusive first use and publication for an appropriate period. It is worth getting in touch with a data management specialist at your research institution to discuss plans and they will be able to guide you on establishing a workable data management plan that meets the requirements of particular funders.

It is important to make and maintain links with the international community of applied linguists. BAAL provides access to an international network that can play a major role in disseminating knowledge both inside and outside the academy. There has inevitably been a bias towards work that is both in English and *about* English given the global status of English and the fact that BAAL is a British association (notwithstanding work undertaken with the indigenous Celtic languages of the UK and its many other migrant and community languages). Nevertheless, 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 and to non-UK varieties of English. Applied linguists must avoid exploitation of colleagues from low income countries and should be sensitive to issues of international academic equity and power relating to the economic circumstances of different countries. This sensitivity includes, for example, supporting the international participation of such colleagues in conferences or other knowledge creation/dissemination events, as well as international collaboration in funded projects that can contribute to the creation of local resources in different parts of the world.

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, knowledge of researchers' prior experiences needs to be passed on to newcomers to the field. More generally, applied linguists have a responsibility to support newcomers to the field (students, research assistants, early-career researchers, 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 ways in which applied linguists communicate with a wider audience. Applied linguists regularly interact with a range of non-specialists, and sections 2, 7 and 9 provide detailed discussion about ways of developing and maintaining good relationships with informants, with sponsors, and with the general public.

For some applied linguistics research projects, such as the development of linguistic corpora, there is an emphasis on producing and publishing open-source (potentially public) datasets, specifically with the intention of enabling the wider research community to access and reuse materials. With such projects, issues pertaining to the copyright and access to data that is to be re-used and re-presented in the published dataset must be considered from the start, including any requirements for anonymising data etc. Some of these issues are explored in the case study below.

**Case Study: Corpws Cenedlaethol Cymraeg Cyfoes – The National Corpus of Contemporary Welsh (CorCenCC)**

**Dawn Knight and Steve Morris**

**Aims and objectives:** CorCenCC is the first corpus of the Welsh language that offers a coverage of contemporary spoken, written and electronically mediated Welsh. The CorCenCC project was an interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research project involving a number of different researchers and stakeholders.

**Data and methods:** Welsh language data was collected from sources including journals, emails, sermons, road signs, TV programmes, meetings, magazines and books. Conversations were recorded by the research team, and a bespoke crowdsourcing app enabled Welsh speakers in the community to record and upload samples of their own language use.

**Main ethical challenges:** 1) Who should permission be sought from? 2) How were appropriate consent forms drawn up, ensuring that participants contributing data were aware that the resulting CorCenCC corpus would be available as an open-source public resource? 3) What language(s) should permission forms be available in? 4) At what stages of the project did contributors have the right to withdraw consent? 5) Should the contributed data be anonymised, and if so, how and why?

**Overcoming challenges:** Given the open nature of CorCenCC, permissions to share the data in an online public resource were obtained from all relevant legal entities before the data was collected and locally stored, that is, all individual speakers, publishers, blog writers and so on.

Participant information sheets and consent forms were drawn up (in English) and approved by legal and ethical specialists at the lead institution, then passed on to the other three collaborating institutions for similar approval. Great care was then needed in developing Welsh versions to ensure they accurately reflected the original version. Although all participants were able to speak Welsh, bilingual permission forms were used to ensure that those whose written skills were not balanced in both languages or whose command of this register might be stronger in one language than the other, were able to clearly understand their commitment and rights as participants in the project.

Up until the point of anonymisation and inclusion of data in the main corpus, contributors had the right to withdraw consent and delete their data from the corpus.

Spoken data was anonymised at the point of transcription, while some types of e-language and written language, where relevant, were anonymised using an automated bespoke anonymisation script before being checked by members of the team. In some instances, contributions did not require anonymisation before being included in the corpus.

**Key Questions**

- Have the researchers conducted themselves in a way that is consistent with the highest standards of academic conduct in the public arena?
- Is the researcher aware of current interdisciplinary developments (accepting the limitations of their knowledge)?
- Has proper weight been given in both teaching and research to work published in and about other languages?
- Has consideration been given to how the data collected will be stored and, where possible, shared with other researchers?
- Is research reported in enough detail to allow other applied linguists to understand and interpret the findings?
- Is the researcher familiar with prominent documents such as the Research Council UK's Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct and the UK Research Integrity Office's Code of Practice for Research (including a recommended checklist for researchers)?
- Have power inequities between a range of colleagues been considered and mitigated where possible?
- Has the researcher considered international collaborations that contribute to dissemination of knowledge?
- Is the researcher ready to circulate the findings of their study outside academia?
- Have newcomers to the field been adequately supported?

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# 7. Relationships with Sponsors and External Partners

Sponsors or funders can become engaged in several kinds of applied linguistics work. Research Councils or charities, for example, may be involved in funding researchers to carry out an independent project. Sometimes sponsors themselves define the research issue and seek expert assistance from outside, and this can happen, for example, with a private sector company or a government department. Sponsors can also be contributors of data, for example, in the construction of corpora or for the analysis of business, institutional or government records. In these instances, contracts will specify the particular requirements for how the data is accessed, sampled, stored, processed and shared. It is advisable to get legal advice on the specific requirements of the contract and to ensure all relevant members of the research team are informed about these.

Increasingly, research agendas and programmes are developed collaboratively between researchers and funders/sponsors, particularly as this often provides a direct route to generating impact. Applied linguists should be careful not to enter into any contract with sponsors that compromises the kinds of professional ethics outlined in this document, but these guidelines acknowledge that such relationships can be complex and time-consuming to negotiate.

In research-based consultancy, where an external party seeks the opinion of a linguist, such as in the form of an expert report or training package, the relationship and expectations require careful discussion. Applied linguists increasingly work with external partners and organisations under a range of different funding structures, as an integral part of their research data collection, analysis and dissemination. A quick glance at the range of current work in applied linguistics shows researchers working with healthcare organisations, law enforcement agencies, businesses, educational and government bodies. Such relationships, whether or not they are directly funded by the partner organisation or by other sources, have become important in driving forward the impact agenda, making academic research practically relevant in settings where it can make a real-world difference. Research relationships with external organisations and practitioners have the potential to be enriching, not only in terms of impact but also in the ongoing participatory frameworks and analysis they enable for the research itself, with members of an organisation able to offer analytic insights on linguistic practices in the research data. However, they can also be difficult relationships to manage. Organisations are not homogenous entities, and the research relationship often involves navigating various members' differing expectations about the research objectives and the degree of critical engagement permitted (for two accounts, see Rampton et al., 2015 as well as the case study below). Staffing at partner organisations are often also in a state of flux, which may mean that the researcher is required to re-establish relationships when new incumbents step into a role.

The perspectives of practitioners within an organisation may be important in producing an ethnographically informed piece of work, but the research relationship may also present challenges for the independence of the analysis they provide. The researcher may need to exercise some caution about how their findings are likely to be used by the organisations or practitioners with whom they work. This can be particularly important in forensic and legal settings, where the linguist acts as expert witness and findings are to be used as evidence for or against a criminal conviction - the Linguistic Society of America provides guidance on this type of work (see further reading below).

Some of the responsibilities applied linguistics researchers hold towards funders and external organisations include 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, where this is more appropriate. Although the time required to carry out a piece of work cannot always be predicted accurately, it is important to price honestly and accurately for it. Researchers should also offer clear, regular and accurate accounts of their work. Investigators should be accountable for the funds spent, and they should never misrepresent data or findings to enhance commercial potential.

Applied linguists may not be able to compel agencies to adopt specific contracts or codes of practice, but they should expect certain treatment; for example, for their professional expertise to be respected, for their work to be properly credited, without any misrepresentation of their views, and for sponsors to act with integrity, fairness, and regard for equal opportunities. Applied linguists need to be careful about the terms on which they accept contracts for investigation or data sharing, as well as being very clear about the level of autonomy they will be able to exercise. Contracts with sponsors raise issues that are too numerous and 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 and contract termination. Before signing a research contract or data-sharing agreement, applied linguists would be well advised to seek expert advice from their institution's contracts department, and refer to the detailed suggestions about collaborative working and conflicts of interest outlined in, for example, the UK Research Integrity Office's (2009) *Code of Practice for Research* and the Economic and Social Research Council's (2016) *Framework for Research Ethics*, which outlines 'Our expectations for research collaboration'.

**Case Study: Working with the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) to analyse the licensing examination for UK general practice**

**Sarah Atkins and Celia Roberts**

**Aims and objectives**: To identify linguistic/cultural factors contributing to poorer performance of International Medical Graduates in the RCGP Membership examination, and develop training tools to prepare for it.

**Data and methods:** 200 GP trainees' exams were video recorded, in which role-played consultations with simulated patients were conducted. Video recordings of the assessments were already going to be made by the RCGP, but the research team gained additional consent from participants to transcribe and analyse the recordings, including secondary consent to use video clips in online training materials.

**Main ethical challenges:** Research that addresses 'fairness' in education and assessment, particularly where those issues intersect with racial and cultural identities, will always be controversial and this project was no exception. Over the life of the project, some of the key challenges included 1) initially gaining agreement on the aims and stretching the scope of the study to include broader institutional practices 2) agreeing a consent process for GP trainees undertaking the exam, 3) maintaining relationships with key players at the RCGP and agreement on the objectives of the research on an ongoing basis, and 4) agreeing on the wording and presentation of the project findings in the context of a legal challenge around the exam.

**Overcoming challenges:** Many of the challenges in this complex setting could only be overcome through continual dialogue and meetings with the RCGP, maintaining links with various people, some of whom were welcoming of the research and others more cautious. The researcher on the project, although based primarily within an academic organisation, became embedded in the external organisation too, and this helped in implementing practical processes for data collection and trust in the research team. Participatory analysis of the data was encouraged through video feedback sessions with examiners and frequent interim presentations. Some challenges, such as maintaining an academically independent critical stance and agreeing on the wording for research findings, were particularly difficult to overcome, and though the researchers maintained an ongoing dialogue during this process, they also had to ensure they upheld the integrity and core principles of their research, including a responsibility to fairly represent the interests of doctors undertaking the assessment. Though a difficult setting in which to conduct research, there were ultimately changes to the assessment as well as to the wider debate at the RCGP. We would argue it is through developing these complex relationships that applied linguistics achieves practical relevance with research findings and ultimately real-world change. Nevertheless, establishing and maintaining these relationships can take a good deal of time, and this needs to be taken into account when designing a study and applying for funding.

**Key Questions**

- Has the researcher clearly articulated the aims, objectives and delivery plans of the research to their sponsor/funder?
- Do contracts with sponsors/funders compromise the kinds of professional ethics outlined in this document?
- Has a collaboration agreement been developed between the researcher and the sponsor/funder that clearly states codes of practices for ethical conduct on both sides?
- Have clear governance structures been put in place within which the research will be conducted?
- Has the researcher sought advice and followed relevant guidelines before signing a contract with sponsors/ funders?

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# 8. Relationships with Institutions

Although it may only be in exceptional circumstances that applied linguists can disclaim all personal responsibility, the universities and institutions that they work for and/or with 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 universities and institutions, but there are certain conditions that applied linguists might wish to look for in employment.

For example, universities should have their own codes of good practice, covering all aspects of their relationship with employees. If multiple universities (and/or stakeholders) are involved, do not assume that there is consistency in their requirements – any discrepancies and/or potential areas for conflict should be identified and discussed in advance of any research taking place. Broadly speaking, however, university codes of practice should facilitate conduct in accordance with the recommendations presented here, which reflect a significant level of consensus across the social sciences. Universities 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. However, applied linguists should not see approval by an ethics committee as absolving them from further ethical consideration as their research progresses: ethical considerations should span the full life of a project and some decisions may need to be re-evaluated as and when issues arise. Researchers should therefore continue to engage in dialogue with ethics committees, using them as a consultative resource where needed. Ethics in research is best considered not just as a 'product', i.e. represented simply by the completion of forms submitted to university ethics committees, but as a process, which begins with planning the research and continues until the research papers and presentations are complete (see Copland, 2008). 'Ethically important moments' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: 262) may arise when researching in the field – these may not have been taken into consideration when submitting your initial university ethics form, but will need to be assessed and responded to when working with, for example, specific participants, in a given context (see Kubanyova, 2008 for a more detailed discussion of this).

Further, external partners and sponsors should not require applied linguists to undertake work which runs counter to the norms of good professional practice (as suggested by, for example, the current BAAL's *Recommendations on Good Practice in Applied Linguistics* and the university employing an applied linguistics researcher). In relation to work funded externally, the external funder and/or sponsor should not compel applied linguists to engage in particular contract projects, and universities 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. 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.

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# 9. 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 linguistics 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.

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, including those that are not directly involved at the time; for example, the potential for research approaches to reinforce assumptions about minoritised language communities. Further, applied linguists should try to anticipate likely misinterpretations or misconstruals of information, and the damage they might cause, and counteract them before they occur.

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, applied linguists should observe the highest codes of personal and professional integrity when acting in such roles (see Nolan, 1995 for guidance). They should be maximally transparent with regards to their involvement and opinion, and the representation of their opinion in any decision-making process.

It is important to consider disseminating one's work both in specialist publications and in more diverse and accessible formats. However, relations with the mass media require particularly careful thought. Selected funding councils, academic institutions and/or learned societies offer hands-on media training – the ESRC has tailored these for researchers at all levels. Whilst the UKRI are currently reviewing their provision of media training, they advise researchers to 'contact their university press offices to see what support is already available'. Publicity for applied linguistics should adhere to the highest standards of information sharing. There are also important considerations for the researcher's well-being (section 3), in terms of the negative attention and abuse that researchers can on occasion be subjected to, particularly though social media. Researchers have the right not to promote aspects of their work to the media more widely and to be supported if media attention becomes problematic. The ESRC's (2016) *Impact Toolkit* provides researchers with detailed suggestions on how to form a productive relationship with the media, including advice relating to the use of social media and effective websites to communicate research.

**Key Questions**

- Have the potential effects of research on a range of groups been considered? Have likely misinterpretations or misconstruals of information, and the damage they might cause, been anticipated?

- Has there been careful consideration of the best way to disseminate research to different publics?
- When serving on a public body or providing expertise to public enquiries, have Nolan's (1995) principles of public life been considered?
- Would the development of a media strategy be helpful for the discussion and dissemination of research?

**References and Further Reading**

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# 10. 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.

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The third edition (2016) of these Recommendations was produced by Svenja Adolphs, Jo Angouri, Tess Fitzpatrick, Tilly Harrison, Jai Mackenzie and Diane Potts.

This current, fourth edition (2021) was drafted by Sarah Atkins and Dawn Knight (coordinators), with contributions from Paul Baker, Kate Barber, Fiona Copland, Tim Grant, Jai MacKenzie and Alison Wray. BAAL is also grateful to the 2021 BAAL EC for comments on the revision of this guide.

The recommendations will need to be developed 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.

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