

how it will be achieved and maintained. They ask about confidentiality, and they inquire about anonymity. They raise questions about what will be done with the materials gathered.

These questions as they are framed in an ethics protocol are often difficult to interpret, and it is important to keep in mind the significance of the general principles that underlie the particular questions that one is asked to answer to have the ethics protocol approved. They can also be difficult to answer. In many cases the questions are not really quite right for linguistic fieldwork, or for qualitative research more generally (see e.g. Social Sciences And Humanities Research Ethics Special Working Committee 2004 for challenges for qualitative research, and Rieschild 2003 for specific challenges in linguistic fieldwork); and in addition, in most cases there is not a single way of behaving ethically, especially in cross-cultural research: what is considered to be not sensitive by one person or one community may be considered to be sensitive by another; what is appropriate methodology in one place is inappropriate in another. Preparing the ethics protocol thus takes care and thought, and it is important to keep in mind that the basic principles that underlie the complex protocol are actually the end point.

While completing the ethics protocol may be a challenge for someone doing fieldwork, at the same time the protocol helps in reflecting about the types of ethical and moral issues that might arise in fieldwork. The types of questions are likely to be asked in some form or another by any group that you are working with. People generally want to understand research in which they are involved: they need to agree freely to be part of the research, understanding its possible consequences; they need to decide who they want the results of the research made available to, and so on.

It is possible that the unit that reviews an ethics protocol might require additional information beyond the core issues discussed above. For instance, they may want an indication of support from the community or communities that you are planning to go to.³ It is important to seek this support early on in any case, whether required by the unit that reviews the ethics protocols or not—seeking support from the community leads to engagement with that community beginning early in the process, before actual fieldwork begins. It is the start of the building of a relationship. Much of ethics involves building respectful, reciprocal relationships, and engagement with a community from the start is an indication that the researcher understands the importance of these values.

In addition to getting a formal ethics protocol approved, there are other things to be done before the fieldwork actually begins. As a linguist, it is natural to want to learn as much as possible about the language of study or closely related languages and about linguistics. A second type of preparation is probably of even greater importance: read as much as possible about the culture of where you are going and talk with people, as many as possible, who are from the area and who have been involved in work in the area. This type of preparation is invaluable in helping you to avoid unintentional harm, in understanding whether your actions might produce good, and in helping to ensure that respect is not naïve. People familiar with the area can give you invaluable advice about many of the issues raised in the next sections. Some communities are pleased to have researchers, and embrace their presence. In other communities, there is much suspicion of researchers, their goals, and their values. To some degree, how you are received depends on the history of research in a community. Some communities are struggling with their own problems, making it difficult to welcome an outsider; some might say no to researchers at a particular time, but welcome them at another time. Flexibility is important.

A first trip to a community will undoubtedly bring many unexpected things, but at the same time you will have had an opportunity to think in advance about many things if you prepare as fully as possible.

In many cases, completing the university ethics protocol and preparation through reading and talking is not sufficient to begin fieldwork. Some communities require that you have their permission before you can go to the community. Whether your own university requires it or not, it is important to find out if you can simply