

The Ethical Codes for the staffs of the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University, Assam, India

The main purpose of this document is to maintain and nurture ethically correct practices at the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University, Assam. Although the question of ethics is debatable and contextual, we try to inculcate those research practices and values which are globally considered ethical and standard. Since, we deal with human subjects, emotional issues, field trips and the copyrights of the linguistic data; it is pertinent to put the conditions in black and white. To avoid conflict of interest, settle ownership issues of data, material, infrastructural properties of the centre, it is important for all of us to follow some practices and norms. The staff and the faculty of the Centre have to work in diversified and remote areas. Hence, it is quite natural for us to come across lots of ethical dilemmas. Therefore, we must exhibit exemplary behaviour and scholastic approach in undertaking a field trip, on the field and after returning, in the production of the research outputs. The staffs of the Centre are obliged to accept the following conditions.

a) The staff of the Centre, in any condition is not allowed to make any lewd or derogatory comments towards the community members under investigation. They must respect their customs, tradition and culture. They are advised not to make any judgemental comments during their field trip and in the field. Gender, marital status, race, ethnic background, social class, political beliefs, disability, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, age, and other such distinctions should not be used as a basis for discrimination towards any member of the community and the community as a whole. (LSA, 2009)¹.

b) The field worker/staff/assistant/faculty member must take formal permission from the informant before asking/recording for any data. They can carry a format of such permission letter and get them signed before conducting any session with the informants.

c) In no condition the informants shall be forced/ lured to provide data to the field worker. It is purely a voluntary act.

d) If possible the informants or community members shall be involved in the pre-production activities of their languages such as data verification etc. before readying the final manuscripts.

e) The field workers can explore the possibility of remunerating the informants with nominal amount or kind. If the community members consider this practice as taboo or disrespectful towards themselves, in any condition it should not be insisted.

f) In each and every research output of these languages, the staff should take utmost care in acknowledging everyone from the community in appropriate places. At any cost, this should not be missed. Again, "Some communities regard language, oral literature, and other forms of cultural knowledge as valuable intellectual property whose ownership should be respected by outsiders; in such cases linguists should comply with community wishes regarding access, archiving, and distribution of results." (LSA, Ethics Statement, 2009)

¹ Linguistic Society of America, Ethics Statement, 2009.

g) The staff of the Centre should avoid intimate relationship with the informants where the power equation is involved. It is because, many under-represented people consider outsiders as government representatives holding power. This might lead to sexual exploitation and conflicts of interest between the field worker and the informants.

h) The field worker must be careful in leaving a good image/impression among the community members so that next time when another field worker visits the village, they can welcome him/her wholeheartedly.

i) The fieldworker/linguist must be very careful not to plagiarise, fabricate any data that were collected in the field.

j) "Regarding data attribution in publications and other products like websites that are the result of linguistic fieldwork, it has become commonplace to find each data example tagged with the name of the speaker." (Chelliah, deReuse, 2011)². The Centre too follows the same practice.

k) In the question of ownership of the collected linguistic data, we will follow the guidelines formulated by the Intellectual Property Act, India. Any dispute will come under the jurisdiction of the Indian Judiciary. However, the Ethics page of Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology instructs anthropologists and linguists to follow these rules: "Especially given the increasing importance of intellectual and cultural property rights, individuals or communities participating in research should be informed that the institute and the researcher seek the right to store, use, and disseminate (with restrictions where appropriate) the material in question, but do not assert ownership of the intellectual or cultural materials entrusted to the institute or the researcher. When stored and disseminated, such materials should always make due acknowledgement to their authors and performers. Authors / performers should be named explicitly only where their informed consent to this has been obtained; otherwise, an anonymous acknowledgement is appropriate. It is appropriate for the researcher to pay the individuals involved in research for their time and travel and other out-of-pocket expenses. It is not appropriate to make payments that might be construed as payments for the transfer of ownership."³ The Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University too follows the same practices and ethics protocols.

l) Any staff before presenting any *under investigation* data or a language with *documentation closure/completed* status in any conference, workshop, paper, books must formally inform the Coordinator of the Centre and take his/her permission. S/he should duly acknowledge the Centre for Endangered Languages in his/her research outputs for facilitating with these data. Furthermore, upon their (staffs) resignation from the Centre, if they reproduce/reuse Centre's data elsewhere, they must ask for written permission from the Coordinator of the Centre.

m) The equipment used on the field and in the office by the staffs of the Centre belong to the University. They must handle them with utmost care. In case of any damage and malfunctioning of any item, they should immediately inform the Coordinator.

(Prepared on 22/05/2020 and subject to periodical revision)

² Chelliah, S.L. & DeReuse, W.J. 2011. *Handbook of Descriptive Linguistic FieldWork*. Denton, USA. Springer.

³ <http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/ethics.php> (Chelliah, DeReuse, 2011)