1 Research Design

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Part I of this volume, "Research Design," addresses two central concerns in relation to sociolinguistic data collection: research design and ethics. First, the chapters and vignettes in this section provide guidelines, offer suggestions, and troubleshoot challenges that can arise when asking research questions, choosing frameworks and paradigms, and designing a study, all of which directly affect what data are to be collected and how. Second, while many authors throughout the volume discuss ethics, the authors of the chapters and vignettes in this section grapple with specific challenging ethics-related questions that are particularly, though not exclusively, relevant to sociolinguists conducting research with human subjects. How should we represent research participants? What issues should we consider when working with vulnerable populations, who may need more protection than ethics boards would normally require? What sort of ethical dilemmas face scholars who work with written documents? How should our ethical decision-making protocols be adapted when conducting research online? As the authors in this section assert, these questions should be considered not only at the beginning but throughout the research process.

In Chapter 2, Barbara M. Horvath emphasizes the diverse frameworks, topics, and methods that are included under the umbrella of sociolinguistic research. Sociology, anthropology, geography, psychology, and other disciplines have influenced sociolinguistics, leading to diversity in research design, methods, and the linguistic and social phenomena to be investigated. As Horvath says, the connection between the linguistic and the social is inseparable and requires the studying of both. As a result, sociolinguists often employ qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodological approaches, as questions about language change in progress (generally quantitative) are frequently tied to questions about what variability means to speakers (generally qualitative). At the same time, while an array of research frameworks, paradigms, designs, and methods is available to sociolinguists, the central concern of sociolinguistics as a field is the nature of language variation and how it relates to social contexts, factors, and outcomes. Within that scope, researchers must decide which aspects of language variation, change, and social meaning to foreground, which to background, and how to do so as they plan and conduct their research.

In Vignette 2a, Marcia Farr extends the conversation about research paradigms and design to multidisciplinary sociolinguistic studies, in which a researcher draws from multiple disciplines to inform the research at hand. Farr illustrates the benefits and challenges of this approach with her own study of transnational Mexican families, which drew from linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, history, sociology, and cultural studies. Multidisciplinary research requires a deep understanding of the concepts being borrowed from other fields. It also requires researchers to be flexible, patient, and open to the evolution that research drawing from multiple theoretical and empirical traditions often necessitates—a process that, Farr says, is demanding but ultimately rewarding.

Four subsequent vignettes address the topic of variables in sociolinguistic data collection. In Vignette 2b, "How to Uncover Linguistic Variables," Walt Wolfram notes the importance of examining linguistic variables that may be outside of the "canonical set" but that may nevertheless provide important insight into sociolinguistic variation. Two such variables—*a-* prefixing in Appalachian English and the "call oneself" construction in African American English—are useful case studies in the methodological and analytic challenges that can arise when uncovering, describing, and analyzing linguistic variables. Similarly, in Vignette 2c, "Studying Difficult to Study Variables," J. Daniel Hasty describes his use of a medical consultation corpus to locate discourse situations in which rare linguistic variables naturally occur, as illustrated by one hard to find morphosyntactic feature: the double modal.

Vignette 2d, "How to Uncover Social Variables: A Focus on Clans," by James N. Stanford, and Vignette 2e, "How to Uncover Social Variables: A Focus on Social Class," by Rania Habib, both discuss complex social variables, which are often imbued with local and contextualized meanings of which researchers may initially be unaware. In his work in southwest China, *clan* emerged as a meaningful social variable only after Stanford became engaged in the community, interacted with a range of residents, and learned the cultural knowledge required to interpret its relevant social structures. In her research in one rural and one urban speech community in Syria, Habib intended to investigate the role of social class on language variation. Unlike in Western contexts, however, where education, occupation, and income are often good proxies for social class, in these communities income and residential area proved to be the relevant class indicators. Both Stanford and Habib note the limitations of assuming that social variables operate in the same way across different contexts. Rather, researchers must acquire in-depth knowledge of the community to determine which social variables are relevant and how they relate to sociolinguistic variation.

Conducting ethical research with those from whom we collect our data has long been recognized as a critical goal for sociolinguists, especially for those who conduct field- and community-based research. In Chapter 3, "Social Ethics for Sociolinguistics," Sara Trechter provides readers with grounding in both normative ethics, which focuses on establishing criteria for right and wrong actions, and applied ethics, which considers how to act in specific situations. She notes that while sociolinguists have traditionally done well in considering applied ethics, we have paid correspondingly less attention to normative ethics, such that the broad concepts of ethics and ethical engagement remain undertheorized in sociolinguistics. As such, Trechter challenges sociolinguists not only to think about the real-life decisions that must be made while conducting research, but also to articulate and debate our philosophical standards and models for ethical reasoning that guide our judgment. Doing so will allow sociolinguists to establish effective, consistent recommendations for how to conduct ethical research.

The major themes that arise in Chapter 3 center on the roles of researchers and participants in sociolinguistic studies and the power relations already present in researcher–participant dynamics. Drawing on her experience as a member of the Linguistic Society of America committee that developed the official LSA Ethics Statement (2006–2009), several case studies from the sociolinguistic literature, and recommendations regarding human subjects' protection in the social sciences, Trechter identifies important considerations that sociolinguists may face when determining ethical obligations to research participants and communities. How much involvement should a researcher have in a community, given that sociolinguistic research tends to hinge upon engaging with members of a community in order to obtain data? How should the needs of a given community be assessed, and how should research participants be represented? How might

research affect and be affected by the sociopolitical contexts in which participants and communities are situated? How might a researcher's status as an insider vs. outsider (or something in between) affect and be affected by her or his ethical obligations—not only to the community and to the participants, but also to her- or himself as a researcher? What do we, as researchers, hope to gain from our work and how exactly do we benefit, particularly at different stages of our careers? What are the rights and roles of various academic stakeholders in the power relations that occur before, during, and after a researcher has engaged with a community or with participants? While answers to ethical questions are generally neither immediately evident nor clear-cut, Trechter advocates that researchers reflect on ethics, sociopolitical relationships, and power dynamics not simply at one or two points but rather at every stage: from the point at which we begin to design our project and continuing throughout the course of the research process.

Following Chapter 3 are five vignettes, each of which provides examples of ethical considerations and challenges that sociolinguists have faced. The first three vignettes illustrate the fact that to do ethical research, sociolinguists must consider how we relate to our research participants, whether we know them and are in close contact with them or not.

Sometimes, what researchers think is trivial, research participants may find harmful. In Vignette 3a, "Responsibility to Research Participants in Representation," Niko Besnier discusses his own research in the Central Pacific. While the study of gossip is a relatively common topic in sociolinguistics, it proved to be a sensitive one for the research participants, and community members had different concerns about how their linguistic practices might be represented locally and abroad. As Besnier explains, the intention not to harm research participants does not necessarily ensure that harm is not done to them or experienced by them; in addition, the concept of "do no harm" does not prioritize ways of giving back to participants to ensure that they benefit from the research they agreed to participate in. In Vignette 3b, "Working With Transgender Communities," Lal Zimman provides a three-step checklist to guide researchers who aim to work with transgender communities in forming productive and ethically responsible research relationships with these speakers. Zimman's approach asks sociolinguists to interrogate our own politics; to educate ourselves about trans issues, concerns, and perspectives; and to carefully consider the language we use to engage with as well as represent trans people, so as to avoid bringing harm (however unintentional it may be) to trans speakers and communities.

In some situations, individuals themselves may not recognize the full potential for harm that they may face if they consent to participate in research, and even the regulations of ethics boards may not ensure that full protection of research participants is secured. In Vignette 3c, "Conducting Research With Vulnerable Populations," Stephen L. Mann describes the dilemmas he faced in his research observing at a public drag talent show held in a gay bar and interviewing self-identified gay and queer men in the U.S. South. On the basis of his own understanding of the potential for harm that might result from his study, Mann decided to adopt a stricter stance toward anonymity than even his university ethics board would have required or his participants themselves had requested.

In cases in which a researcher is using secondary data, consent from research participants may not be required, but ethical issues may nevertheless arise based on how data are represented and individuals are portrayed. In Vignette 3d, "Ethical Dilemmas in the Use of Public Documents," Susan Ehrlich discusses her research on the discourse of women who have been complainants in rape trials. Because she works with public documents, the women whose language data she is analyzing are not active participants in the research; furthermore, there is the potential for their data to be read and interpreted by

others in ways that objectify and sexualize the women. For Ehrlich, questions linger as to how to protect participants from misrepresentations and how to use research to benefit them in the face of the potential, however indirect, for research to cause harm.

Vignette 3e, "Real Ethical Issues in Virtual World Research," by Randall Sadler, deals with similar themes related to the domain of conducting online research. As Sadler discusses, ethical challenges and temptations can arise when collecting data in virtual worlds. With examples from research conducted in two different virtual worlds, Sadler provides recommendations for how to assign pseudonyms, obtain informed consent, evaluate participants' accessibility, consider how participants perceive privacy, and assess risk to participants (particularly children) in order to help maintain high ethical standards when conducting online research. In sum, technological change can affect the quality, type, and scope of language data that sociolinguists collect; it can also affect research participants, who on the one hand may be increasingly comfortable with technology, access to media, self-publication, and self-revelation, but on the other hand may be less aware of the potential for risk when agreeing to take part in online research.

As the authors of these chapters and vignettes suggest, as sociolinguists we should plan our research carefully and strategically in advance in order to maximize our potential for conducting effective and ethical research. Open-mindedness and flexibility are also needed for researchers to be able to integrate relevant frameworks from other disciplines, spot new variables, adjust how we conceptualize and operationalize traditional variables, and adapt our research plans as necessary to fit the local context of the research situation at hand.

The research process can raise a host of dilemmas related to power dynamics, inequality, authority, authenticity, empowerment, advocacy, access, risk, and privacy. These complexities require us to recognize how research is socially embedded and to interrogate the consequences of engaging in research for both researchers and participants. We must consider the participants behind our data just as carefully as we consider the data themselves, seeking to understand throughout the research process how the questions we ask and the data we aim to collect to answer our questions have bearing on real life and real lives.