Ethics and collaboration between cognitive linguists and speakers of minority languages

Alice Gaby[1], Lesley Woods[2]
[1]Monash University, [2]Australian National University
Alice.Gaby@monash.edu, Lesley.Woods@anu.edu.au

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Collaborations between (indigenous and non-indigenous) linguists and speakers of minority languages typically involve a lot of goodwill. The goodwill of speakers who are willing to share their knowledge and insights is obviously foundational to the success of any fieldwork-based research. But while many fieldworkers report the desire to reciprocate by supporting the language interests of the individuals and communities they collaborate, they may be unsure how to do so and/or how to balance this desire against the demands of their home institution. This tension might be most keenly felt by cognitive linguists working on topics that are not of immediate relevance to language maintenance and revitalisation.

This talk will draw on interviews with linguists and Indigenous community members in Australia (Woods 2017) as well as case studies of linguistic collaboration (e.g., Carew 2017; Couzens, Eira & Stebbins 2014; Garde 2017) to consider the following questions:

1. What are the respective needs, wants and interests of linguists and Indigenous communities? Where do these align and where are they in tension?

2. How can Indigenous ownership of language knowledge be preserved?

3. What role can universities play to support ethical collaboration between linguists and Indigenous communities?

4. What role(s) can linguists play in supporting Indigenous communities and their languages?

On this basis, we make some recommendations for both individuals and institutions in how to support ethical linguistic collaboration in project and program design. In particular, we consider how cognitive linguists can involve their community collaborators in selection of research topic, study design and analysis, and why this is important both for the language community and the linguistic project itself. We present evidence from two case studies (a qualitative study of kinship metaphors and a quantitative experimental study of time metaphors) that Cognitive Linguistic research is enhanced by the input of community collaborators at every stage.

References

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