Linguistic Fieldwork and IRB Human Subjects Protocols: The LDC Experience

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General principles for human subjects research
- Respect for persons: autonomy, consent, truthfulness
- Beneficence: do no harm, maximum research goals
- Justice: fair, non-exploitative procedures

Common Rule concerns
- Will the study require the participation of vulnerable populations?
- How will informed consent be obtained?
- How will confidentiality be maintained?

Social sciences research
- IRB reviews geared for medical research
- Lack of uniformity
- Miscommunications
LDC’s Protocol

- In place for almost 20 years with University of Pennsylvania’s IRB
- Covers speech, text, handwriting, language-related judgments
  - On-site at LDC, in the field, crowdsourcing
- Data collected distributed as corpora to support language research, education and technology development
- Umbrella protocol modified as needed to add new studies, approve new/revised consent forms, modify existing studies
- Largely successful
  - Challenges: new collection methods/technology, timing, increased interest/attention to social science research methods
Protocol Features

◆ Record linguistic performance
  ● Speech, writing, typing, dictation
  ● In person, via phone, computer-mediated device, writing surface, no human/machine interlocutor
  ● Optionally with headset transmitting silence/noise

◆ Collect judgments about linguistic behavior and decisions involving linguistic data
  ● Auditing speech recordings
  ● Judging handwriting legibility
  ● Summarizing written text, reading comprehension

◆ Collect linguistic performance
  ● Gaze tracking, strokes/minute
Non-remote field locations (Philadelphia, Seoul)
- Speech recorded to digital recorders/computers; copied to LDC database as soon as practicable

Remote field locations (Papua New Guinea)
- Bilingual native speakers record participant speech to digital recorders
- Uploaded to laptop; backed up on mass storage device; uploaded to LDC following each field trip

Personal identifying information
- Logbooks → spreadsheet → mass storage device → LDC

Data
- Secure storage; encrypted spreadsheet; fieldworker control
- LDC: secured network, locked file cabinets
◆ Consent
  ● Written consent; informed consent form
  ● Verbal consent, recorded (unwritten languages, speakers not literate in native language(s))
  ● Consent through action (pushing button for telephone study; performing crowdsourcing task)

◆ Accommodations for IRB
  ● Examples of questions that will be asked
  ● “Script” for verbal consent
Conclusions

◆ If “the way to do fieldwork is never to come up for air until it is all over” (Margaret Mead), getting the protocol is simple by comparison.

◆ Preparation – be able to articulate your plan

◆ Relationships – department, IRB
  ● Fieldwork is consistent with federal guidelines

◆ Crib from/use available resources
  ● Be sensitive to IRB independence