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SOME VIEWS ON ETHICAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES RELATING TO LINGUISTIC DATA COLLECTION FROM ENDANGERED INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

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Abstract

Do those people, who primarily live in urban cities, have the ethical right to conduct linguistic field surveys among those indigenous speech communities to which they do not belong? This question has been haunting language investigators, dialectologists and field linguists for years and they are yet to find a way to successfully defend their right to work among the indigenous speech communities. This question arises because, in many situations, it is observed that the members of indigenous speech communities have raised questions about why these urban people come to their living places to procure data from their language and language-related information, which they are not often willing to share with the 'outsiders'. This leads to the generation of many unwanted conflicts and the 'outsiders' need to affirm, in some way or the other, that as outsiders they have no legitimate right to sneak into the life of an indigenous speech community, and that they must have prior approval or consent from community members before recording and collecting linguistic data and information from them. Besides this primary ethical question, many other ethical issues are directly related to participation and involvement of members of an indigenous speech community in linguistic field surveys for providing data and information.

Keywords: field surveys, individual rights, community rights, linguistic rights, ethical issues

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ALGUNES OPINIONS SOBRE ELS DRETS I LES RESPONSABILITATS ÈTICS EN RELACIÓ AMB LA RECOLLIDA DE DADES LINGÜÍSTIQUES DE LLENGÜES INDÍGENES EN PERILL D'EXTINCIÓ

Resum

Les persones que viuen principalment en zones urbanes ¿tenen el dret ètic de fer treball de camp entre les comunitats de parlants indígenes a les quals no pertanyen? Aquesta pregunta ha preocupat investigadors, dialectòlegs i lingüistes durant anys, i encara no han trobat la manera de defensar amb èxit el seu dret a treballar amb les comunitats de parlants indígenes. Aquesta pregunta sorgeix perquè, en moltes situacions, s'observa que els membres de les comunitats de parlants indígenes es pregunten perquè aquestes persones urbanes acudeixen als seus llocs de residència per obtenir dades de la seva llengua i informació relacionada, la qual sovint no estan disposats a compartir amb els forasters. Això genera nombrosos conflictes indesitjats, i els forasters han d'afirmar, d'una manera o altra, que, com a forasters, no tenen dret legítim a immiscir-se a la vida d'una comunitat de parlants indígenes, i que han d'obtenir l'aprovació o el consentiment previ dels membres de la comunitat abans de registrar i recopilar dades i informació lingüística. A més d'aquesta qüestió ètica primària, moltes altres qüestions ètiques estan directament relacionades amb la participació dels membres d'una comunitat de parla indígena a estudis de camp lingüístics per proporcionar dades i informació.

Paraules clau: treball de camp, drets individuals, drets comunitaris, drets lingüístics, qüestions ètiques

ALGUNAS OPINIONES SOBRE LOS DERECHOS Y RESPONSABILIDADES ÉTICOS EN RELACIÓN CON LA RECOPIACIÓN DE DATOS LINGÜÍSTICOS DE LENGUAS INDÍGENAS EN PELIGRO DE EXTINCIÓN

Resumen

¿Tienen las personas que viven principalmente en zonas urbanas el derecho ético de realizar trabajo de campo entre las comunidades de hablantes indígenas a las que no pertenecen? Esta pregunta ha preocupado a investigadores, dialectólogos y lingüistas de campo durante años, y aún no han encontrado la manera de defender con éxito su derecho a trabajar con las comunidades de hablantes indígenas. Esta pregunta surge porque, en muchas situaciones, se observa que los miembros de las comunidades de hablantes indígenas se preguntan por qué estas personas urbanas acuden a sus lugares de residencia para obtener datos de su lengua e información relacionada, que a menudo no están dispuestos a compartir con los forasteros. Esto genera numerosos conflictos indeseados, y los forasteros deben afirmar, de una u otra manera, que, como forasteros, no tienen derecho legítimo a inmiscuirse en la vida de una comunidad de hablantes indígenas, y que deben obtener la aprobación o el consentimiento previo de los miembros de la comunidad antes de registrar y recopilar datos e información lingüística de ellos. Además de esta cuestión ética primaria, muchas otras cuestiones éticas están directamente relacionadas con la participación y el involucramiento de los miembros de una comunidad de habla indígena en estudios de campo lingüísticos para proporcionar datos e información.

Palabras clave: trabajo de campo, derechos individuales, derechos comunitarios, derechos lingüísticos, cuestiones éticas

1. Introduction

In this paper, we are addressing some of the important ethical issues that are directly linked with linguistic field surveys among endangered indigenous speech communities. Most of these issues are characteristically and ethically different from

those that we consider relevant when we conduct linguistic field surveys among the non-indigenous or advanced speech communities. We have to understand that the responsibilities of a linguistic survey team, which is involved in language documentation, have to be careful, sensitive and conscious when they are physically engaged in collection of linguistic data and information from the least resourced endangered languages that are spoken by indigenous speech communities, who are mostly living at some relic areas far away from the mainstream human habitation. Ethical issues are of high importance due to several cultural, legal, social, humanistic, and ethnographic reasons, which play crucial roles in the process of language documentation (Nelson et al. 2023). These issues become instrumental, and sometimes decisive, during various stages, namely, survey planning, informant selection, data elicitation, data analysis, data sharing, report preparation and resources generation (Hale 1972). Since all these issues cannot be addressed here, in this chapter, we highlight some of the primary ethical issues with direct reference to the experiences gathered from linguistic field surveys conducted over the last one decade among some indigenous tribal and endangered speech communities in several parts of India (Dash & Aman 2015, Aman et al. 2020a, Aman et al. 2020b).

The rights and responsibilities of a linguistic survey team, in principle, are ‘bi-directional’, if we keep in mind that in normal and standard linguistic field surveys there are at least two different groups of people who come into contact with each other for two separate sets of goals and motivations (Abbi 2001). Any linguistic field survey can be conducted successfully only when both the groups are adequately aware and vigilant in the execution of their ethical rights and responsibilities through mutual cooperation and constructive collaboration with a vision for actualizing their respective short-term goals and long-term missions. In principle, it is possible to design a conceptual interface to show how the interests of the two different groups can be maintained and addressed through a joint action plan of balanced sharing of rights and distribution of responsibilities (Figure 1).

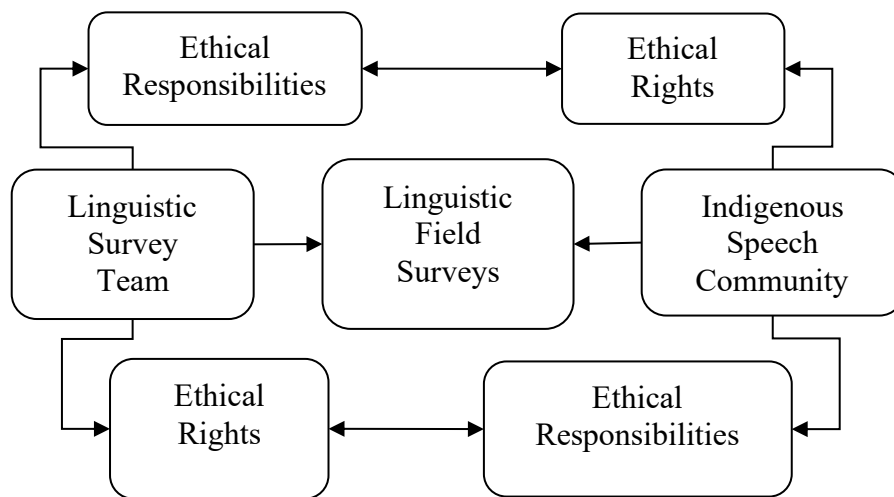


Figure 1. Interface of two stakeholders in linguistic field surveys

The diagram above (Figure 1) gives us an idea to understand how the two different groups (i.e., *Linguistic Survey Team* and *Indigenous Speech Community*) are engaged in the act of data elicitation and collection through linguistic surveys, where each team has a set of pre-defined roles relating to its ethical rights and responsibilities. It is to be understood that ethical responsibilities of a survey team are directly linked with the ethical rights of the indigenous speech community; that means, it is the responsibility of the survey team to follow and adhere to the guidelines and the working methods so that the ethical rights of the community members are never hampered or breached. On the other hand, ethical rights of a survey team are linked with ethical responsibilities of the community members in the sense that the community members are expected to be little more open so that a survey team can carry out its duty without feeling themselves ‘outsiders’ and not thinking that they are forcefully treading into the sensitive domains of the community life. In both cases, it has to be kept in mind that the fragile issues of ethics have to be handled carefully so that they do not break down to block the path for future collaboration and block roads for mutual growth (Good 2018).

2. Ethics in linguistic field survey

The term 'ethics' is taken from the Old French *ethique* which is obtained from the Latin *ethica*, which is again derived from the Greek *ēthikḗ* sliced from Greek *ēthikós* "of or for morals, moral, expressing character" and originated from the Greek *ēthos* "character, moral nature" (Source: *wiktionary*). By definition, it refers to the basic concepts and fundamental principles of decent human conduct. In a wider sense, it includes the study of universal values such as the essential equality of all men and women, human or natural rights, obedience to the law of the land, concern for health and safety, and also for the natural environment and ecology (Source: *business dictionary*).

The general concept of *ethics* has undergone several stages of modification over the centuries. In the present context, we understand the sense of the term in the act of language data and information collection from endangered ethnic speech communities and utilization of the same in various academic, research, social, ethnographic and commercial purposes. In this the context of preservation of indigenous languages and culture, it acquires a different shade because it addresses some of the crucial issues of human rights of indigenous communities (e.g., *individual rights, community rights, tangible and intangible property rights, linguistic rights, cultural rights, heritage rights, ecology rights*), which are usually ignored in traditional field-based linguistic surveys. Since these endangered speech communities are often made target for exploitation, an elaborate charter for ethical rights of the endangered communities is an absolutely essential condition for conducting field survey. Keeping this in view, in the present chapter, we primarily concentrate on those ethical issues that are directly related to linguistic field surveys among the endangered indigenous speech communities.

Ethical issues and controls in linguistic field surveys have received special attention globally in recent times due to many reasons. In case of India, unfortunately, people are not much aware of its importance and significance. Many Indian field linguists still lack ethical clarity, visibility, and openness in dealing with endangered

ethnic communities. Most of the linguists, who are engaged in the work in endangered language documentation, are yet to understand their roles, duties and their involvement in field-based linguistic surveys (Austin 2010a). Although, in India, it is well known that ethical issues are of great importance in case of medical, legal, commercial and media surveys (Mathur 2017), it is not yet realized by many that similar ethical issues are equally relevant and important in linguistic field surveys. We, however, believe that ethical guidelines should carry equal weightage in endangered language documentation and survey-based linguistic data elicitation. Moreover, since a field-based linguistic survey is based on a cordial relationship between the data collectors and the data suppliers, it plays a significant role in setting up an introductory platform for starting a documentation work (Bower 2008: 148). Pragmatically, everything depends on the nature, goal, and management of a field survey, which requires a proper understanding of the nerve and mental state of the members of a community through clear expression of respect and honour for their life and identity as well as through careful application of ethical practices and questionnaires considered for a survey (Labov 1972). A field linguist needs to understand the inner and outer spheres of an indigenous speech community in minute details so that their ethical and human rights are properly maintained and preserved. And to do this, a field linguist should understand certain factors under the umbrella term 'ethics', which can be helpful in carrying out the steps involved in data elicitation from the informants located in their own ecological settings (Hale 1965).

There are several sensitive aspects, events and issues (e.g., *likes and dislikes, opinions and views, preferences and objections, eagerness and reluctance*) of the members of an indigenous speech community, which can have a direct impact on the overall scheme of language documentation and inference deduction from analysis of data and information obtained from the informants involved in a field survey (Nida 1981). From the early days of field linguistics, the participation of people from different speech communities as active informants in data elicitation work is accepted despite a few stray conflicts and disturbances (Wenker 1881, Ellis 1889, Gilliéron 1902-1910, Orton 1962, Wright 1905, Chambers & Trudgill 1998). It is often assumed, and most often wrongly, that members of indigenous language communities have nothing

to object to field surveys as the surveys are carried out for their benefit. Rather, they should be grateful to the field workers and understand that a team of experts has come from outside to perform an evangelical task to revive and promote their language and culture vis-à-vis the entire community. Such a wrong and illusive idea on the part of the field linguists often leads to unwanted conflicts with community members the results of which are neither good for the field workers nor for the community.

Only recently scholars have started raising questions regarding the nature of the involvement of informants in field surveys as well as the nature of treatment extended to these informants by the survey team members because several unwanted events have led to the generation of serious conflicts between the two groups involved in surveys (Chelliah 2001, Rice 2006, Austin 2010a, Chelliah & de Reuse 2011). Moreover, this has led to asking some ethical issues which require well-defined guidelines to monitor and check the nature of the 'willful' participation of informants in surveys. On global platforms, it has been an issue of serious discussion and a topic for defining ethical guidelines and constituting ethics committees for safeguarding the rights of community members. It also asks for charting out clear responsibilities of the survey team members for the interest of the project (Dwyer 2006). Against this background we look into the rights and responsibilities of a survey team as well as the indigenous speech communities who are participating in the documentation work.

3. Responsibilities of stakeholders

Field linguists usually work in diverse settings while they try to collect data from indigenous speech communities. Each speech community, due to its unique ethnic identity, presents different sets of potential ethical issues and dilemmas. It is the responsibility of the field linguists individually and collectively to understand the ethical issues and dilemmas and take necessary measures to avoid bringing harm to those people or communities with whom they work. On the other hand, the

community members, who are supposed to supply data to field linguists, may need to take a kind of pragmatic approach that becomes conducive to the scheme of a survey. In this section, we refer to the responsibilities of all the stakeholders involved in linguistic field surveys and give a simplified and general framework for exercising their ethical responsibilities.

3.1 Responsibility of Principal Investigator

The Principal Investigators (PIs) are primarily responsible for the work of the project and should try to maintain a high degree of professionalism in all aspects of the project. They should maintain the standards of conduct found in other disciplines that depend on field surveys. They should practice honesty (e.g., by not plagiarizing or fabricating data) and carefully cite the original sources of data, descriptions, information and ideas. While conducting linguistic field surveys, they should take extra care to protect and preserve opportunities for the new generation of scholars who may follow them in the future. They should utilize modern techniques and technology to protect and preserve data, documents and information they elicit as these are original and irreplaceable materials for the speech community and others. They should invariably try to fulfil the promises made in the project proposals and should make efforts to achieve the targets in full. They should keep in view both the short and long-term social, cultural, political, and ethnographic implications of their surveys and research outputs. They should make the findings of their studies available to target communities, policymakers, government bodies, funding agencies, next generation of researchers, and general people. They should also take an effort to make processes and challenges of their surveys comprehensible to general people. They should be vigilant to control possible misinterpretations of their surveys and findings and anticipate potential threats that try to damage their goals and objectives. Finally, they should carefully consider whether it will be appropriate to pay compensation of some kind to the informants. It may be in the form of remuneration for time, effort, knowledge and expertise that may be beneficial to the informants or their communities.

3.2 Responsibilities of a survey team

The survey team members should follow ethical behaviour both on and off the field. It is an essential part of their professional activities. They should be rightly trained and instructed in ethical practices that are considered appropriate for their field surveys. They should develop and maintain very respectful relationships with the informants as well as with other members of the community who are not taking part directly in the act of data supply. Also, they should be careful not to harm fellow workers, informants, community members, technicians, onlookers, or others engaged in the survey. They should recognize, acknowledge and attribute contributions of the informants and others to their work. In appreciation, they should compensate informants fairly for their support and assistance in the tasks. They should evaluate the information provided by the community members in a fair and unbiased manner. Also, they should, if the situation demands, take views from informants either individually or collectively so that the authenticity of data and information is cross-validated. They should never use demographic and sociocultural variables of informants (e.g., *gender, age, education, marital status, race, ethnic background, social class, political beliefs, disability, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, and other such distinctions*) as a basis for discrimination. They should not develop intimate relationships with informants or fellow workers. An intimate relationship may lead to exploitation and conflicts of interest as well as damage the project goal. They should carefully avoid such involvement when a Principal Investigator is responsible for the success of a project. They should be rightly trained and instructed in ethical practices that are considered appropriate for their field surveys. They should, where feasible, facilitate informants and community members, if interested, to access their research results.

3.3 Responsibilities of informants

The informants, as and when asked, are expected to share their knowledge and information of other relevant issues and aspects of their lives with the researchers or field workers. Even when a project focuses exclusively on language and does not require an elaborate ethics review, the informants should be aware that their role is properly defined in field surveys along with their rights and wishes. They should extend support to ensure that the survey is not a threat and the well-being of the field workers as well as other members of the team is well assured. They have the right and responsibility to check whether their actions are recorded in such a way that they can be connected with their personal identity. They have the right to check and confirm who will have access to the resulting data, with full knowledge of the potential consequences. They should give their ‘informed consent’ to those field workers who are collecting data and information from them (regardless of whether and how that consent is documented), as a part of their responsible participation in the survey. They should have the right to maintain confidentiality in data sharing and for ensuring that their participation in the research is completely voluntary at every stage of elicitation. They should also ensure that the anonymous observations of public and passive onlookers, should not be a part of the information shared by them. They should be aware of any inadvertent application of ways based on which their identity (where sensitive) is concealed from others not linked with the research.

3.4 Collective responsibilities

Besides the individual responsibilities of PIs and FLs engaged in a linguistic field survey, we can also envisage a collective responsibility of the two towards the speech community. Although it is difficult to define the ‘constitution’ of a speech community, we assume that the team can seriously consider how their research can affect not only individual informants but also the entire speech community. They should take an effort to determine what will be constructive and beneficial for all those people who are involved in a survey; take seriously into account the community’s cultural norms,

ritualistic practices, social systems, ethical values, belief systems and other acceptable and non-acceptable practices of the target speech community. It has to be always kept in mind as well as exercised that direct or indirect, verbal or non-verbal interactions of the survey team with the members of the community must vary depending on culture, history and belief system of a particular indigenous speech community.

On many occasions, it is observed that diverse linguistic information and cultural knowledge are viewed as 'community properties' where individual members are not allowed to share these materials with outsiders. In such a context, the survey team should first find out if informants can legitimately represent a speech community to share these materials as well as identify those individuals who have the authority to allow others to share data and information on behalf of the community. In many indigenous language communities, oral literature, private texts, secret knowledge, community rituals, secret family knowledge and other forms of cultural heritage are protected as valuable intellectual properties; and outsiders are never allowed to have access or ownership of such properties. In such situations, the survey team should honour the tradition of the community and comply with the desires of the community regarding access, archiving, and distribution of data and findings. On the contrary, there are many indigenous communities, who are eager and willing to share their knowledge due to long-term reciprocal relationships and relational bonding. In all those cases where an indigenous community has a clear mandate for language-related data and information sharing, the survey team should discuss the issues with community members in an elaborate fashion, to understand and honour their sentiment behind their decisions, and involve the community members in a fair manner from the very beginning of the project so that there is no conflict at subsequent stages with regard to data procurement, sharing and utilization.

4. Ethical questions

According to the norms of various ethical committees, there are several queries before a linguistic survey team receives an ethical clearance certificate to conduct linguistic field surveys (Nagy 2000). The whole process of acquiring permission requires comprehensive justification and appropriate responses from the survey team in order to convince the ethics clearance committee. Some important questions that are usually raised in the charter of ethical rights and duties of linguistic field surveys are linked with the following issues:

- Primary objectives of a research, design of a study, materials to be used, methods to be adopted, nature of data to be procured, and amount of sample to be collected.
- Particulars of the target indigenous speech community to be involved in a survey.
- Demographic details (i.e., *age, gender, ethnicity, community, social group*) of informants considered relevant for the survey
- Justification of geographic variables (e.g., *region, area, locality*) selected for the survey.
- Nature and type of information to be furnished in the questionnaire.
- Qualification and experience details of the survey team.
- Risk factors involved in the process of collection of data and information.
- Informed Consent Form for informants willing to provide information.
- The actual method of elicitation and storage of data and information.
- Confirmation of rights of informants to withdraw, during or after an interview, from the survey.
- Confirmation of destruction or preservation of information collected.
- Remuneration/honorarium for informants (in cash or kind).
- Availability of data and information to others (including informants).
- Preservation of data beyond the date of completion of a project (how and where)

- Sharing of data and results with informants, community, institutes, organizations, Government, industries, NGOs, foreign agencies, commercial usage, etc.

Although all these issues are not relevant and mandatory in every event of a filed survey, in most of cases, the majority of the issues become relevant, and the PIs as well as the linguistic survey team need to be trained before they practically venture into field for the purpose of data collection.

5. Issues related to ethics

5.1 Respect, recognition and Involvement

Dignity is an inherent property of all human beings and any linguistic field survey that involves human subjects must place the highest regard on this value. The survey team, while conducting field surveys among endangered speech communities must follow the following conditions before. During and after the survey (Macaulay 2004):

- (a) Show a strong commitment to specific research principles already defined and explained to the members of the team.
- (b) Honour their informants with proper dignity at the time of obtaining data from them.
- (c) Should be careful in safeguarding the rights of those informants who may be especially vulnerable to exploitation.
- (d) Must be aware of possible harm that might be done to the informants and community during a survey.
- (e) Must seek possible steps to eliminate or reduce these harms to a minimum level.

Besides these major responsibilities, a survey team should equally be concerned to know whether the subject matter or the topic of a particular survey is socially

acceptable, correct, and ethically rational. That means, during a field survey, the social values of the target speech community have to be given optimum importance, and the attitudes and reactions of the informants must be thoroughly taken care of. The judgment of informants about the importance of the work carried out by the survey team can play a crucial role in the entire course of a survey. It is, therefore, important to note that proper respect for moral and ethical values of the target speech community should be clearly visible in gestures and attitudes of the entire survey team.

5.2 Consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding

Consultation, negotiation and free and informed consent are the foundations for research with or about indigenous peoples (AIATSIS 2000). To understand the intricacies of the culture of an indigenous speech community, it is necessary to understand how the informants react verbally and nonverbally to the questions asked by the survey team. There should not be imposition of any kind on informants while they contribute data during an elicitation process. The opinions of the informants should clearly be reflected in the discourse and it must be free from all constraints. Since each linguistic field survey carries a specific goal, objective and plan, one has to ignore certain things while conducting a survey as well as must mould some questions in a manner so that community members do not feel any constraint or pressure on them at the time of answering these questions.

Field linguistics is primarily a way of obtaining data from individuals and studying various linguistic phenomena. Informants are those who furnish data with some samples of data, either as repetitions of what has already been said or as creations of what somebody might not have already said (Samarin 1967: 6). It is always essential to create interest among the participants who are supposed to be involved in the survey to form a strong personal bond and mutual trust in order to keep the team ethically sound and object-oriented for carrying out the survey.

Ethical issues are linked with the question of justification about the participation of an external team in the act of collecting linguistic and extralinguistic data, which are

sole properties of an indigenous speech community. These are also related to some other factors like dealing with the people in the act of data collection, confirming their nature of involvement in the whole process, utilization of data in academics, research and commercial purposes, and eventual benefit of the target speech community. Many such explicit and implicit factors can raise crucial questions with regard to the pertinence of field surveys among the less-resourced endangered and indigenous speech communities. But all these issues can be addressed only when these are decided through open public discourse to justify why a particular linguistic field survey within a speech community is necessary and how this survey is going to contribute to the overall growth and sustenance of the target community (Rice 2006).

5.3 Cultural differences

The cultural differences between indigenous speech communities on one end and the field workers on the other (*especially those workers who are attuned to city life*) hold a possibility of unwanted miscommunication and misunderstanding during a question-answering session in surveys. Since it is common for field workers to engage with those communities that make use of a common lingua franca, usually a third-party interpreter is not sought. In cases such as this, differences in acquired social values, beliefs, gestures, mannerisms and word choices between these two groups (*i.e., informants and field workers*) may lead to miscommunication that could result in hostility, misunderstanding, misreporting of data or similar types of unforeseen challenges. The ethical rights of both parties should be safeguarded as it becomes quite difficult due to differences in social practices to discern or identify implicit or veiled behaviours or euphemisms that indicate a certain message.

A different scenario is noted regarding India and some South Asian countries. Most of the female members of indigenous speech communities feel hesitant in engaging themselves in interviews with strangers or male members coming from outside of their community (especially without the presence of male members of their family). They have some predefined restrictions that prevent them from contacting

outsiders on any ground. This brings in a serious ethical barrier in the process of informant selection. Since older women usually preserve the most native form of language within their small composite circle, they are believed to be ideal and authentic informants for heritage data. In this case, the field workers are in a great dilemma to decide whether they should choose these women as informants for authentic data or simply leave them in their closets following the norms of the speech community.

5.4 Alcoholism

Ethical crises can arise in data elicitation when indigenous informants are under the spell of drug or intoxication. The majority of indigenous speech communities in India have a well-accepted practice of intoxicating themselves, so much so that it has started to draw the attention of various NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and researchers. It is a challenge when intoxicated informants willingly approach field linguists to supply data. Since their compromised control over their own behaviour will negatively impact the process of data elicitation, field linguists need to adopt and apply skilled strategies to deal with such undesired interference of un-called-for informants in the process of data elicitation.

Another unrecognized challenge arises about the use of alcoholism as a means of exploiting or abusing informants in the process of collecting secret or prohibited data while these informants are under the influence of alcohol. There have been several unrecorded instances of data collectors taking advantage of alcoholism among tribal communities and wielding unfair means to either collect data or exploit them for their own amusement in the name of conducting field research. The administrative authorities often draw a blind eye to the exploitation and abuse of human rights when it comes to indigenous communities. As a result of this, crimes or abuse of this nature are often left unrecognized. In fact, the lack of human rights awareness makes it easy for members of indigenous speech communities to be abused and exploited in a field interview setting. In such a situation, it should be maintained that all interviews and

recording sessions are monitored by local governing bodies to safeguard and protect rights and ensure the safety of both parties.

5.5 Data manipulation

Data manipulation can endanger an entire speech community's identity and can result in language misrepresentation and even language extinction. In most of the indigenous speech communities in India, code-mixing and diglossia (Ferguson 1959) are very common phenomena. There is a prevalence of a mixed variety that is made of a mixture of the powerful language and the indigenous language, which leads development of a unique lingua franca specific to these communities only. When it comes to data elicitation, especially by people belonging to the more powerful speech community, biases towards their own language can skew the representation of indigenous languages during the formulation of questionnaires, data elicitation, data normalization, text annotation, text analyses and even in producing results. It is necessary to take measures for increasing the awareness of researchers and field workers regarding underlying biases against marginalized communities and their languages.

A linguist-focused view of language data in indigenous studies like to consider this 'data' as something that can be assessed and worked on without community input whereas a collaborative consulting approach to field linguistics involves the concerned indigenous community at all levels and stages of data analysis and knowledge storage (Holton et al. 2022). While the latter is considered to be more ethically robust and justifiable, more often than not, it is observed that during academic works related to indigenous data collection and representation, only informants who are directly associated with or engaged in data elicitation and verification are concerned with the preservation of ethical rights. The knowledge at the community level that is carried by and preserved through the members of the speech community in their textual diversities (*e.g. proverbs, idioms, chants, hymns, lullabies, ethnomedicinal information, oral tales, history*) which are often shared in linguistic research work (*e.g., typological,*

structural, sociolinguistic, corpus generation). The sharers of such knowledge usually have little to no understanding of the impact of sharing such community-specific knowledge even after regular collaborative consultation sessions. It is, therefore, the duty of the Principal Investigator and field workers who have an upper hand in ethical awareness to communicate to the community leaders and key informants the effect or impact of sharing such knowledge not just on individual members but on the entire community.

5.6 Informed consent form

It is a necessity to prepare an Informed Consent Form (ICF) for the informants in order to substantiate and satisfy the authority that there is no sense of unwillingness on the part of the informants to participate in the linguistic field surveys. The ICF should be descriptive enough to explain all the points relating to linguistic field surveys and the reasons behind conducting these. The motive of a survey, the nature of data elicitation, the role of an informant, and the possible benefits of an informant should be clearly stated in the ICF. In those situations, where informants are not competent enough to read and interpret the content of an ICF, it should be prepared in standard, regional, and local languages to make it interpretable by informants. The need of having an ICF properly understood and signed by an informant is necessary because linguistic field surveys involve varied aspects and issues of social, community, and personal life of the indigenous people. We have experienced that an ICF duly understood and signed by informants can help in developing the required understanding and fruitful interactions which eventually serve to generate appropriate responses on the part of the community members. From this perspective, a comprehensive ICF is a strong safeguard for all the stakeholders starting from the PIs, field workers, informants, and indigenous speech community and the research itself. Given below is a sample of ICF that may be consulted, revised and adopted depending on the goal of a particular linguistic field survey (Figure 2).

Informed Consent Form	
<p>I, the undersigned, hereby inform you that I have clearly understood that the purpose of this Linguistic Field Survey is to elicit relevant linguistic data and information (phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, grammatical, cultural, sociolinguistic, discorsal) from me to document the language we speak. I am willfully participating in the survey (name of the survey), which is being conducted by (name of the Dept.), (name of the Institution), (State), (Country) in my village/locality/region. My participation in this survey entails the recording of my speech in digital audio and video format. My participation in this survey is voluntary; and no penalty or disadvantage will accrue to me for non-participation, not any benefit for my participation. The portion of my interview may be played in linguistic discussion and presentation or may be transcribed in written format for demonstration purposes and will be used for linguistic analysis and materials development. Additional copies of my interview may be made for backup purposes. Original text and all copies of it will be accessible to investigators, researchers, me, and others working in this area. It will be used for linguistic analysis, research, presentation, archiving and development. It will be kept in the digital archive of (name of the Department), (name of the Institution), (State), (Country). I am free to contact the Principal Investigator if I have any question or concern relating to this survey or my participation in it. I have full freedom to withdraw myself from this survey, if I want to, at any point in time without showing any reason to the survey team. By signing below, I, hereby, certify that I have read and understood the terms and conditions and that I agree to participate, in accordance with them, in the above-named Linguistic Field Survey.</p>	
Signature of Informant/Participant	Signature of Principal Investigator
Date: Place:	Date: Place:

Figure 2. Format of an Informed Consent Form used in linguistic field survey

5.7 Compensation as wage

Giving some compensation for the information and time spent by informants is a crucial ethical issue in collection of linguistic data from indigenous speech communities. In practice, there are at least two contradictory arguments regarding paying wages to informants.

(a) **Supporting View:** It is unethical not to pay any wage to informants for their long engagement in interviews. Informants should be paid for the time and information that have spent during the interviews.

(b) **Opposing View:** Payment of wages to informants is not desirable at all as it can distort the whole purpose of a linguistic field survey, as it may open scopes for manipulation of informants in data elicitation by bribing. Also, it can lure informants to respond in the manner the field workers want the informants to speak to.

As a matter of rational judgment, in our view, fair compensation should be given for the time and labour the informants have given for the survey. The pragmatic realization is that people engaged in surveys have a value of their time; and therefore, there is nothing wrong to pay informants when they spend their valuable time for the interviews. We know that this may create many new situations in response to payment. Some informants may show extra enthusiasm for providing data for money and compensation, while others may become sceptical and even reluctant; still, others may not be ready at all to accept compensation of any kind for their engagement. In those cases, where informants are quite happy to spend their time and information just for the sake of money, it is quite fair to give them money and get their data. But when money is not a choice, the survey team may think of compensating the informants through different means, such as offering food items, offering usable items like bags, pens, notebooks, and umbrellas, helping them build broken houses, providing blankets during winters, etc. There should be, however, some kind of linearity or balance in paying compensation of wages to the informants; else, conflict may arise among the informants. In many indigenous speech communities, members are willing to make interaction with field linguists as well as provide data only when they are given wages. It is, therefore, the primary duty of the survey team to understand the ability, domains, and interests of informants before engaging them in data elicitation tasks. Also, it is their responsibility to be alert so that informants do not try to manipulate a survey by attempting to furnish false data which may lead to wrong analysis and false observation. Also, there are risks of jealousy, attitude, arrogance,

ego, and self-centeredness among the informants which can make a survey quite difficult to handle. It is always safe to take local public guidance to get the best result.

5.8 Intellectual and cultural property rights

Intellectual property rights are legal frameworks that are concerned with possession and circulation of documented data (i.e., speech or text) and information, which can be termed as 'right to property' or 'right to the medium of economic exchange' (Dwyer 2006: 46). When linguistic field surveys are part of an ongoing language documentation process, one has to decide and settle the copyright issues with the members of indigenous speech communities. Here also one must keep clearly in mind that the property rights of data and information undoubtedly belong to the informants and the indigenous speech community. On the other hand, once the data is collected, encoded, processed, analyzed and made available for studies, research and resource generation, the property right may be extended and shared by the survey team and content developers with full written permission from the members of the indigenous speech community. All the three groups can collectively discuss and decide whether to keep the data under a 'self-usage scheme' or make it available for global reference and access (Newman 2007: 30).

We may observe an ethical dilemma regarding the intellectual property rights of indigenous knowledge of a community. In many indigenous speech communities, intellectual property, traditional knowledge and indigenous systems (e.g., *ethnomedicine for treatment of diseases and ailments*), cultural heritage and literary text materials are not protected by any copyright law (Boruah 2018). In those situations, when field linguists collect a large amount of language-related materials in the form of lexical lists, written notes, audiotapes, photographs, and videotapes, it becomes an issue of debate if these materials can be used for future activities of various kinds, including publication and commercial use of the resources, without the consent of the members of indigenous speech communities. Also, questions may arise about whether it would be ethical to use these materials, photographs and multimodal

documents of their traditional culture and knowledge for open public access through digital portals. In such a context, one may define ethics as “...a way of working that you, the research community and the speech community think is appropriate” (Bowern 2008: 149). Moreover, “...ethics are strongly a function of culture, and what may be considered ethical in one community would be unethical in another” (Bowern 2008: 150). Here, we have to keep in mind that all theories and methods of ethical rights and responsibilities are designed and executed by non-indigenous individuals and institutions mostly to address those challenges that can pave ways their means for using resources without many objections from the communities the data and information are obtained from.

5.9 Digital archiving of data

In a scheme of the indigenous language documentation, ‘language archive’ is understood as a large depository of speech data that is collected from indigenous communities by a linguistic survey team over a long period of time. The purposes of archiving language data are many: referential use of data by future generations, conduction of new studies and research on the community, utilization of data in development of language-based applications, utilization of data in linguistic resource development, use of data in language planning and policy-making, and utilization of data in sister disciplines. The multipurpose utilities of indigenous language data have recently acquired a much wider spectrum due to availability of various types of data:

- (a) **Textual data:** word lists, sentence lists, idioms, proverbs, phrases, jargons, etc.
- (b) **Discourse data:** free discourse texts, cultural texts, transcriptions, translations, conversations, narratives, folk texts, etc.
- (c) **Multimodal data:** rituals, ceremonies, dances, songs, chants, riddles, histories, etc.
- (d) **Non-linguistic data:** photographs, flora, fauna, instruments, and other related items.

All these types of data are directly connected with life and living of indigenous speech communities as well as true reflection on the life these people have been living over generations (Austin 2010b).

Archiving resourceful linguistic data and information is always an important area in documenting endangered indigenous languages (Craig 1997). Preserving the spoken interactive texts elicited from informants after conducting field surveys is always a necessity which should be one of the strong motives of a survey team. Since data of this kind has a vital role in the maintenance and revitalization of endangered indigenous languages, it is expected that the collected data is properly archived so that the community members, survey team, research team and other interested people can have access to the archives. Compared to earlier policies, methodologies, and techniques, the present-day policies, methodologies and techniques for conducting data elicitation work, processing and analyzing elicited data, as well as storing the data in digital archives for future global access are much more advanced, organized, purpose-oriented and user-friendly now.

5.10 Administration, Documentation and Usage

The local administration networks may vary in accordance with the geographical locations where the indigenous speech communities are living for generations. In most cases, it is expected that the members of a survey team are acquainted with the administrative formalities of the geographical areas, where the surveys are to be carried out (Newman 1992). Moreover, they are trained enough to measure the degree of their acceptance by the locality as well as acceptance of their framework by local administrators, indigenous communities, local police authorities, local interest groups, local government, and other agencies directly linked with local administration. The survey team has to understand and accept the constraints imposed by local administrators on dates, times, locations, personal questions, personal choices and other issues that must be followed carefully during the course of interviews and data collection. In many situations, there may arise questions about safety and security of the people of both the groups, which has to be addressed through the initiation of

formal intimation of information of proposed surveys and desired communities with the local administrators a strategy that can help to dissolve many unwanted conflicts and troubles during and after the execution of survey works. Given below is a sample letter (Figure 3) written to the local police administration before the commencement of a linguistic field survey in an indigenous speech community in India. It eventually helped the survey team to amicably dissolve many political and cultural conflicts (mostly external) that arose during the field survey.

The Officer-In-Charge	
Local	Administration
Date	
Full Address	
=====	
Dear Officer,	
Greetings!	
<p>This is to bring to your kind notice that a team comprising field linguists, technicians, a local mediator, a cameraman and a videographer, under the supervision of the Principal Investigator (name, designation and affiliation), will visit several villages under your police station during (mention the time period) for the purpose of language-and-culture related data collection from the dialect spoken in that particular geographical region.</p>	
<p>This work is being carried out as a part of the Pan-Indian project for the protection, promotion and preservation of the endangered mother tongues/dialects of India undertaken by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India. The process of data collection involves elicitation of conceptually equivalent words, conceptually equivalent sentences, and free discourse texts from the native informants of the dialect through direct verbal interactive interviews recorded in digital audio and video mode at various places in the region. The data will be stored in an archive and will be made available for research and development works of the dialect community.</p>	
<p>I, hereby, request you provide local administrative guidance, support and security to the survey team in retrieving necessary linguistic data and information from the dialect community during the days of survey as stated above. During the survey, the team is supposed to stay at a lodge near your police station.</p>	
<p>I shall remain grateful if you kindly consider my request and ask your office to do the needful. Thank you.</p>	
With best regards,	
Cordially,	
Head of the Department	
University/Institution	

Figure 3. Sample letter written to a local police station before a linguistic survey

Since the primary objective of a linguistic field survey is to elicit data and information about an indigenous language from its community members, the survey team should be extra careful about the quality of data because data of poor quality will not only create problems in data processing and analysis but also put up technical challenges in data annotation, archiving and preservation. Elicitation includes linguistic properties such as words, sentences, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs as well as various language-related materials like folk stories, folk tales, folk songs, folklores, lullabies, personal experiences, literary texts and artworks symbols, names, images and everything which relate to their language, culture, religion, history, customs, heritage and ecology (Nida 1947, 1958). It should be, however, clearly assimilated that every single piece of information and data that is collected after getting the consent of informants and legal clearance from authorities of the region is indeed the property of the indigenous communities. There should be no confusion in it. The survey team has been given permission and the right to collect data and document them for the community at large; and the survey team is actually working on behalf of the indigenous community. They have received approval from different authorities for storing, analyzing and utilizing the data for the benefit of the indigenous communities as well as for themselves (Wilkins 1992).

Proper care should be given to the data that have been collected so that it is free from any kind of distortion, mutilation, modification, or any other sort of deformation of the actual data. Also, if the data has been archived and publication rights have been made accessible, any misuse of the data by the users or others should be prohibited. Change of any kind in content and authenticity of data will be considered a violation of the rights of the informants and the indigenous community.

6. Conclusion

Ethical issues in a linguistic field survey among indigenous speech communities are primarily concerned with what strategy the survey team adopts and applies when they start interacting with the native speakers of an indigenous community. Since there is a huge difference between the objectives of the two groups of people engaged in a linguistic field survey, it is natural that the ethical rights of one group will hardly match that of the other. It, therefore, should be visualized as a reciprocal scheme where one group's rights are another group's responsibility and vice-versa. Also, it should be kept in mind that the theoretical study of ethics (under the philosophical domain) and what actually applies while a survey team work in the field among the members of indigenous speech communities are two different things (Dwyer 2006); and it is always better to focus on the practical aspects of the issue than on its theoretical postulations in an actual linguistic field survey.

For decades now, we have understood that 'field linguistics' is primarily a way of obtaining data from a language or a variety, studying its linguistic phenomena from various angles and perspectives (Samarin 1967: 1), and utilizing linguistic data and information for developing useful resources for the community under investigation. And informants are those who supply a survey team some useful samples of language data that has both referential and applicational relevance in both short- and long-term language preservation schemes. The success of a survey essentially depends on how much interest we have been able to generate among the community and the informants who are invited to be involved in the survey; the kind of relational bond we have been able to build; and the nature of mutual trust we have been able to develop in order to keep the survey team ethically sound and object-oriented for carrying out the survey.

Informing an indigenous community in detail about the purpose and goal of a particular field survey as well as having verbal or written consent from them are two foundational duties which should never be neglected by a survey team engaged in a linguistic field survey. This kind of ethical clearance is indispensable for a survey team who is specially dealing with minority, lesser known, aboriginal and endangered

languages because unless additional care is taken, the entire process of data collection may create an atmosphere of antagonism which may become tremendously stressful for the people engaged in the survey. Apparently, when a team goes for a linguistic field survey, the members of the team try to collect data from informants from their natural surroundings; i.e., they conduct interviews at those places where the language is spoken by the people who usually speak it (Bowern 2008: 148). In reality, a field survey is not just a simple act of language data collection from the natural environment; it is something more. It develops a network of close personal relations between the field workers and the community members which last much beyond the phase of initial meetings and interactions to spread into the veins for a longer duration to develop an environment of mutual trust, reciprocal respect, and collective cooperation (Wolfram 1993). Therefore, understanding the social, linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic and ecological fabric of an indigenous community is a real challenge in determining the areal canvas of fieldwork. We must have enough idea about the geo-climatic constructs and ethnocultural texture of the location of a linguistic survey because it determines the course of subsequent surveys. Similarly, selections of native informants, understanding their linguistic abilities, usage and tolerance level for outsiders are other factors, which also become matters of great concern during the process of conducting field works (Abbi 2001:23).

The works relating to the documentation of endangered indigenous languages in India and South Asian countries require additional attention in terms of creating ethical frameworks that can be used by field linguists as well as members of indigenous communities. In a context when we are visualizing a documentation programme as a part of creating linguistic materials usable by the target indigenous communities, the issues relating to intrusion, interaction and ethics with the community members need to be fabricated on a wider frame as we desire to include the sceptical members of the community within a network of long-standing mutual trust and wilful cooperation. A documentation task, in this model, can be of great significance for those indigenous speech communities, where linguistic materials are either scanty or not available. It may also result in generating opportunities for

economic empowerment for the community members, which may very well go beyond the line of ethical boundary to produce a network where field workers vis-à-vis the Principal Investigator play a role of a catalyst. In essence, a trustworthy and fruit-bearing mutual bond between a linguistic survey team and the informants can purposefully facilitate an indigenous community to achieve many goals towards the improvement of their linguistic and cultural identities, which, in itself, can be a great achievement as a result of ethical and functional collaboration between the stakeholders.

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