

SATIRE:

Guidelines for ethical conduct in the care and use of students

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In recent years, research into certain aspects of language acquisition has proliferated to the point where research projects have replaced curricula. Probably some important research is being carried out, but it is also important that researchers should conduct their teaching and research in a manner consonant with relevant laws, regulations and ethical considerations.

To assist researchers in thinking about the important ethical issues surrounding the use of students in research, the following guidelines were adapted from those developed by the American Psychological Association (APA) for use by psychologists working with animal subjects. The APA is in no way responsible for what follows, and the reader should proceed with appropriate caution and with tongue in cheek. Though in a spirit of satire, some of the issues here are worth reflecting on. Material that is paraphrased from APA sources is in grey ink.

Research Justification

A. Research should be undertaken with a clear scientific purpose. There should be a reasonable expectation that the research will a) increase knowledge of the processes underlying the evolution, development, acquisition, maintenance, alteration, control, or biological significance of linguistic behavior; b) determine the replicability and generality of prior research; c) increase understanding of the language processes under study; or d) provide results that benefit the health or welfare of humans or other animals.

B. The scientific purpose of the research should be of sufficient potential significance to justify the use of real students. Language acquisition researchers should act on the assumption that procedures they themselves would find painful and unfair will likely be similarly received by students.

C. The students chosen for study should be best suited to answer the question(s) posed. The language tester should always consider the possibility of using other species, nonstudent alternatives, or procedures that minimize the number of students in research, and should above all be familiar with the appropriate professional literature and be competent in the statistical procedures used.

D. Research on real students may not be conducted until the protocol has been reviewed by an appropriate committee, for example, an international human rights organization, to ensure that the procedures are appropriate and humane.

E. Language acquisition researchers should monitor the research and the students' welfare throughout the course of an investigation to ensure continued justification for the research.

Personnel

A. Language acquisition researchers should ensure that personnel involved in their research with students be familiar with these guidelines.

B. Linguistic behavior is both the focus of study of many experiments as well as a primary source of information about a student's health and well being. It is therefore necessary that researchers and their assistants be informed about the behavioral characteristics of their student subjects, so as to be aware of normal, cultural-specific behaviors and unusual behaviors that could forewarn of problems.

C. Language acquisition researchers and graduate student advisors should ensure that all individuals who use students under their supervision receive explicit instruction in experimental methods and in the care, maintenance, and handling of the specific group being studied. Responsibilities and activities of all individuals dealing with students should be consistent with their respective competencies, training, and experience in either the classroom or the field setting.

Experimental Procedures

Humane consideration for the well being of the students should be incorporated into the design and conduct of all procedures involving students, while keeping in mind the primary goal of experimental procedures the acquisition of sound, replicable data. The conduct of all procedures is governed by Guideline I.

A. Behavioral studies that involve no aversive stimulation to, or overt sign of distress from, the students are acceptable. These include observational and other noninvasive forms of data collection.

B. When alternative behavioral procedures are available, those that minimize discomfort to the students should be used. When using aversive conditions, Language acquisition researchers should adjust the parameters of stimulation to levels that appear minimal, though compatible with the aims of the research. Language acquisition researchers are encouraged to test painful stimuli on themselves, whenever possible. Whenever consistent with the goals of the research, consideration should be given to providing the students with control of the potentially aversive stimulation.

C. Procedures in which the student is anesthetized and insensitive to pain throughout the procedure and is then euthanized before regaining consciousness are generally acceptable.

D. Procedures involving more than momentary or slight aversive stimulation, which is not relieved by medication or other acceptable methods, should be undertaken only when the objectives of the research cannot be achieved by other methods.

E. Experimental procedures that require prolonged aversive conditions or produce tissue damage, metabolic disturbances, or severe psychological trauma require greater justification and surveillance. These include prolonged exposure to extreme environmental conditions, experimentally induced peer killing, or infliction of psychological trauma or tissue damage. A student observed to be in a state of severe distress or chronic pain that cannot be alleviated and is not essential to the purposes of the research should be euthanized immediately.

F. Procedures that use restraints must be considered carefully.

G. The return of students to the field can carry substantial risks, both to the formerly captive students and to the ecosystem. Language students reared in the classroom should not be released because, in most cases, they cannot survive or they may survive by disrupting the natural ecology.

H. When euthanasia appears to be the appropriate alternative, either as a requirement of the research or because it constitutes the most humane form of disposition of a student at the conclusion of the research:

1. Euthanasia shall be accomplished in a humane manner, appropriate for the culture, and in such a way as to ensure immediate death, and in accordance with procedures outlined in the latest version of the American Medical Association (AMA) Panel on Euthanasia.

2. Disposal of euthanized students should be accomplished in a manner that is in accord with all relevant legislation, consistent with health, environmental, and aesthetic concerns, and approved by the student care committee. No student shall be discarded until its death is verified.

Field Research

Field research, because of its potential to damage sensitive ecosystems and ethnologies, should be subject to human rights organization approval. Field research, if strictly observational, may not require such approval.

A. Language acquisition researchers conducting field research should disturb their populations as little as possible consistent with the goals of the research. Every effort should be made to minimize potential harmful effects of the study on the population and on other human populations in the area.

B. Research conducted in populated areas should be done with respect for the property and privacy of the inhabitants of the area.

C. Particular justification is required for the study of endangered language groups. Such research on endangered language groups should not be conducted unless human rights organization approval has been obtained and all requisite permits are obtained. A copy of the real Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Animals, and the APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct may be obtained from their web site (www.apa.org/science/anguide.html) or from: APA Order Department P. O. Box 2710, Hyattsville, MD 20784-0710 USA. Both are highly recommended.

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