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“I haven’t seen any results yet”: on ethical collaborative research in linguistics and the need for a standard protocol

https://doi.org/10.1515/ling-2025-0016
Received January 15, 2025; accepted January 18, 2025; published online March 10, 2025

Abstract: What does ‘good’ ethical conduct in linguistics look like from the perspective of the communities with whom we work? We address this question by drawing on observations from a community-bridging and knowledge exchange exercise involving both researchers and members of researched communities. Based on the experiences of those co-authors on the research team working with and for two associations representing Latin Americans and Chagossians in the United Kingdom, we discuss power asymmetries in collaboration, academic gatekeeping, and issues surrounding knowledge production, with specific reference to the design and implementation of funded research projects in formal linguistics. The paper’s originality lies in the practical recommendations made to the formal linguistics community on the basis of our synthesis of the testimony offered, so as to promote equitable and ethical research conduct. These include a prioritising of principles drawn from community-based and participatory research frameworks, the co-design of a long-term action plan, and a reconsideration of resource allocation to incorporate opportunities for professional development and infrastructure building. Our contention is that striving for a research design that is beneficial to the community on their terms should be the guiding star of project planning inasmuch as it is both ethically compelling and achievable.

Keywords: formal linguistics; community-based research methods; collaboration; minoritised-language communities; research ethics; research funding

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1 Introduction

There is a long-standing tradition in linguistics scholarship of reflecting on researcher-community relations on the one hand, and the pursuit of an objective science on the other (see most recently D'Arcy and Bender 2023). However, it has been a critique of linguistics that such a pursuit has been too extractive an enterprise (cf., Charity Hudley et al. 2024; Deumert et al. 2020 and contributions therein), despite early notable interventions that touched on ethical conduct, notably in fieldwork (see Samarin 1967). Even in sub-disciplines that have foregrounded researcher-community relations in the pursuit of objectivity, such as modern sociolinguistics, what constitutes 'good' ethical conduct has long been and remains an area of active reflexive contemplation (e.g., Bodó et al. 2022; Cameron et al. 1992; Deumert 2021; Labov 1982; Wolfram 1998 *inter alia*), where debates around extractive practice are ongoing (cf., Davies 2018; Rickford 1997; Rodríguez Louro and Collard 2021). Indeed, recent research has called for "more reflection on community-linguist partnerships" (Rodríguez Louro and Collard 2021: 790), not least because emergent testimony by colleagues sets in stark relief the institutional challenges faced by engaging in ethical community-driven research (see most recently Riestenberg et al. 2024).

Arguably, the question becomes even more pressing in the field of formal linguistics. Being, by definition, more concerned with abstract structures and rules underlying language (see also Chandra et al. 2025 for a discussion), this is a field which does not enjoy the same well-rooted tradition of reflecting on researcher-community relations as in, say, sociolinguistics. It is, then, not an over-reach to suggest that formal linguistics takes (at best) a neutral position on these issues in the pursuit of an objective science. This stance is intimately connected with the 'descriptive' approach that formal linguistics takes, which has also been the subject of critique on moral grounds (see Kibbey 2019). Where research projects in formal linguistics also involve minoritised or threatened communities, such a neutral position can become even more problematic, not least from the perspectives of those participants with whom we work, as others have argued for linguistics more broadly (e.g., Czaykowska-Higgins 2018; Dobrin and Berson 2011 *inter alia*). In this paper, we will give voice to these perspectives, and we will argue that 'good' ethical conduct must include some consideration of and collaboration with the community under study in the scope of the research project, even if this does not necessarily overlap with any a priori theoretical goals. More specifically, we build on the existing scholarship by offering reflections on a collaboration comprising individuals who are both researchers and members of researched communities. While we do not subscribe to any strict dichotomy between researcher and researched (given the makeup of our team, which includes

two community members), our intended audience is primarily research groups in formal linguistics that do not include representation from researched communities.[1] In particular, we seek to answer two related questions: (i) What are the issues that emerge where academics collaborate with minoritised linguistic communities? (ii) What protocol might be proposed to address them? We approach these points by foregrounding the experiences of two disparate community groups faced by very different challenges, but who have nonetheless experienced similar problems when faced with would-be collaborators entering the community, with specific reference to funded research projects. It is by centring these voices, offering a synthesis, and proposing action points to formal linguists that we make a novel contribution to the ongoing debates discussed in the following section.

2 'Good' ethical conduct in linguistic research

There has been a recent flurry of activity on the state of play of 'good' ethical conduct in linguistic research, itself a reflection of a wider shift across disciplines inside and outside of the Humanities. In one recent appraisal, D'Arcy and Bender (2023) make the case that our conception as a field of what constitutes 'good' ethical conduct in research has evolved. Seen initially as merely aligning practices with ethical codes of conduct as overseen by governance frameworks and university research ethics committees (or 'institutional review boards'), ethical conduct is now considered instead in terms of the quality of the relationship between researcher and researched (this distinction has been termed "macro" vs. "micro" ethics, see Kubanyiova 2008: 505). It also involves the extent to which research is reciprocal between the academy and the community, and the extent to which this relationship confers "responsibilities and obligations" (D'Arcy and Bender 2023: 49) on the researcher (see also Dobrin 2025, on "ethics as compliance").

Part of the reason for this ongoing critical reflection of practice in the field is the now well-established recognition that there needs to be a continued corrective to the more extractive norms that linguistics has contented itself with. These often amount to cases where the linguist structures the research project around particular epistemologies, methods, and goals, and the communities themselves only provide 'the data'. As Montoya (2024: 31) discusses, this tradition, which is very much embedded in a colonial praxis, continues to benefit the academy to the detriment of researched communities, who may conversely see little (and often no) benefit. These extractive practices are also in many ways inextricably linked to wider structures of

1 The authors acknowledge here that the issues we raise would not necessarily apply to all communities, but our experiences suggest that there would be common issues.

the academic institution. In North America, for example, Leonard has argued that "colonial structures [are] so strongly ingrained in research norms that they are hard to move beyond" (2021: 22–23). In Australian indigenous contexts, too, the impact of colonial structures of some type of academic research has been particularly nefarious (e.g., Woods 2023). We interpret these issues as norms governed at least in part by institutional frameworks. In the UK, recent research has highlighted that university research ethics committees themselves can play a role in devaluing and disempowering participants and communities from whom 'the data' come, typically through their pursuit and application of rigid (and often exclusionary) frameworks (Kasstan and Pearson 2024).

In an effort to correct these extractive practices, an important body of published work has situated the discussion of research methods in linguistics within a much wider discourse of decolonisation (see e.g., Smith 1999, and, more recently, discussions in Charity Hudley et al. 2020, 2024; Deumert et al. 2020). Space prohibits us from entering into a detailed discussion of scholarship in this area, but we would highlight for our purposes that these discussions have often promoted and advocated for a wider adoption of community-based research (CBR) methods in linguistics (see also Atkins et al. 2025), which are germane to the present discussion.[2] Yet the application of these methods is not itself without controversy, as we will see. Below we briefly outline CBR and its principles before turning to the specificities of our own work.

Czaykowska-Higgins (2009) proposes two different models of conducting research involving different kinds of relations between linguists and community: the linguist-focused model and the community-based model. As she states, the most idealised form of the linguist-focused model would be that of "a linguist as a disinterested observer" in a community, and not a participant in it, i.e., a model of research that assumes "linguists and the communities they work with belong to separate worlds, that there is a divide […] between researcher and researched, expert and non-expert" (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009: 17–22). Conversely, in the most idealised form of the community-based model the linguist might instead adopt some type of community involvement through all stages of the research design. In this view, CBR is community-situated and collaborative from design and conduct through to outcomes. Further, scholarship in CBR highlights a number of basic principles by which the linguist can and should operate (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009; Rice 2018; Stenzel 2014 *inter alia*). First, the relevance of the research topic itself should be

2 While space prohibits us from offering a more complete representation of decolonial research here, it is noteworthy that Indigenous and Aboriginal scholarship in particular has advocated for and adopted novel research paradigms grounded instead in local epistemologies (see e.g., Montoya 2024).

identified or validated by the community, who ideally would be involved in every stage of the research design. Consultation with the community on everything from basic aims and objectives, to research questions, to determining roles and outcomes on a research project is therefore a core methodological concern (in other fields of linguistics this has been termed "prior ideological clarification", e.g., Grenoble 2009: 66). Second, the research process should be made as accessible as possible and built on a foundation of local partnership. Third, the research should be made practical, with the aim of improving social conditions. CBR, which is on a par with other types of participatory action frameworks (e.g., TRUST 2018), is thus social-justice oriented. Fourth, knowledge should be democratised, that is, researchers should valorise the communities with whom they work as experts on their language and community, not least as a means for researchers to begin to recognise and address power asymmetries between themselves and the researched communities. Lastly, there is in CBR a general principle of duty of accountability to the community post-project as a means of ensuring longer-term sustainable relationships and collaborations. The linguist must therefore also consider the longer-term impacts of the collaboration with the community (compare this approach with that of the "parachute linguist", Bradley and Bradley 2019: 251).

Outside of those subfields of linguistics very much in the vanguard of adopting CBR-type methods, such as language documentation and language endangerment (which in the past have also had to contend with extractive behaviours, see Grenoble 2009), there is now recognition that a move away from a linguist-focused model needs to gather pace, as we have said above. While colleagues in sociolinguistics have openly called for the adoption of better, more collaborative models for some time now (see most recently Rodríguez Louro and Collard 2021), similar calls are emerging across disciplinary boundaries, and particularly where research takes place with minoritised-language communities (see, e.g., Leivada et al. 2023). We would agree with D'Arcy and Bender (2023: 54) that "Being ethical and behaving ethically are […] significantly more complicated than following regulatory mandates and guidance […] they are relational, binding the researcher to partners, collaborators, and participants; to the communities in which we work; and to the broader outcomes of our work, both within the academy and beyond". However, we contend that this notion of relationality in good ethical conduct is not widely recognised in research practice inside and outside of linguistics, as recent scholarship suggests, and as the experiences reported in this paper will further indicate. Further, it is certainly not (yet) a guiding star of postgraduate training in linguistics broadly speaking.

Before discussing these experiences in more detail, we note there are, equally, criticisms of CBR-type approaches, most of which seek to divorce researcher-community relations from the process of what the researcher sees as 'doing objective

science'. Focusing specifically on linguistics, Newman (2003: 6), for instance, speaks of the "troubled […] notion" that "researchers have an obligation to spend half their time doing […] linguistic social work" and to "justify our work on the grounds of immediate social relevance". In other words, adopting CBR is, for some, akin to "confusing community development and activism with research" (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009: 43). Crippin and Robinson (2013: 126–132) adopt and develop a similar argument, arguing that research becomes paternalistic, solely for the benefit of the community, with no clear benefits for the researcher, noting that, under such a framework, "the linguist's goals are essentially subordinated to the community's goals, with community as sole deciders of the direction of the research". They further seek to defend the linguist-focused model, which for them means "not tak [ing] political sides". In a similar vein, others have proposed that a CBR approach is "too informal, not sufficiently scientific or rigorous […] too intangible to evaluate" (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009: 43). Such criticisms of this so-called "new age view of collaboration" (Leonard and Haynes 2010, cited in Crippin and Robinson 2013: 126), are remarkably similar to those raised in other disciplines where participatory approaches have been introduced. López (2023), for instance, charts the epistemology of Participatory Law Scholarship in part as a response to the scepticisms expressed in their field.[3] These arguments form part of a well-trodden debate on CBR in language documentation research and allied fields (cf., for example, arguments raised in Bowern and Warner 2015, and, *contra*, Robinson and Crippin 2015). Space limitations prohibit us from retreading the arguments raised in response to these criticisms. However, in describing the work that we have conducted below, our interest here is not so much in further belabouring the point that linguistics cannot be 'done objectively' in the sense outlined above.[4] Rather our aim here is to move the field forward by illustrating what delivering such work can and should look like, thereby paving the way, we hope, for a fruitful dialogue.

3 "Professor Tarunabh Khaitan characterizes legal scholars who engage with others outside of academia to inform the production of knowledge as *compromising* the 'moral obligations' of a scholar" (López 2023: 1804) [emphasis is our own]. Similarly, Participatory Law Scholarship rejects "the narrow and detached notion of expertise […] epitomized by Khaitan, who believes that the sanctity of knowledge production depends on legal scholars abandoning their 'activist impulse' and retreating from the world to discover the truth" (López 2023: 1804).

4 We would agree with the statement that linguistics cannot be objective in this sense, i.e., that "scientific investigation of a language, including technical aspects of its grammar, cannot be understood in isolation from its sociopolitical and sociocultural context" (D'Arcy and Bender 2023: 50; see also Czaykowska-Higgins 2018: 113).

3 Community-bridging and knowledge exchange

This paper emerged from an ongoing collaboration between us as co-authors as well as other members of the researched communities who are the focus of this paper. Before the present authors came together, two independent projects in linguistics were running concurrently and it became apparent that both communities faced common issues in relation to collaboration.[5] These issues were then raised at the 'community session' of the "Romance Grammars, Context and Contact" workshop held at the University of Birmingham in January 2024. Following the event, we ran a series of small community-bridging and knowledge exchange sessions at the University of Westminster in March 2024 which consisted of consultations between the present authors as well as reflections on previous work that we have conducted (e.g., participatory workshops, sociolinguistic interviews). The aim of these sessions was to establish and better understand what lessons could be taken from communities collaborating with university academics. From these consultations there emerged a need to articulate a variety of issues about collaboration. Our reflections below are drawn from a meta-analysis of these wider sessions. First, we flesh out in more detail the researched communities with whom, and for whom we work: Latin Americans in London, and the organisation Latin American House who serve this community (Section 3.1), and forcibly displaced Chagossians in the UK who are supported by Chagossian Voices (Section 3.2). We then report on the observations from our knowledge exchange and community-bridging exercise (Section 4), which we supplement, too, with testimony from the communities themselves through research that we have conducted (Section 5). We end by offering to formal linguists some practical recommendations that are informed by CBR for the specific purpose of building collaborative funding bids (Section 6).

3.1 Latin American house

Latin American House (LAH) emerged in 1983 as the Latin American Association with the aims of supporting social inclusion and improving conditions for Latin Americans, as well as other local minority communities, in London (principally Kilburn, Camden, and Brent).[6] In 2008 LAH became a registered charity, acquiring its current name. Today, although its ties to the local communities remain strong, LAH aims to be a source of support and information for the Latin American population

5 See projects listed under Research funding.

6 For further details, see https://casalatina.org.uk/.

throughout the UK. LAH provides a range of services, including legal and social advice, adult education, children's education, as well as a variety of cultural and community activities, many of which are delivered at their community centre in Kilburn. LAH's articulated mission is to provide lifelong skills in order to empower the Latin American communities to become more self-reliant and resilient, and to continue addressing the challenges and opportunities faced by this migrant population, as well as to increase their representation, participation, and recognition in the UK.

3.2 Chagossian Voices

Chagossian Voices (CV) is a community organisation providing a public and community platform for all Chagossians, an exiled people (and their descendants) from the Chagos Archipelago, which was depopulated and from which all Chagossians were forcibly removed by the UK government between 1968 and 1973.[7] CV emerged as a platform to bring together members from a number of already existing groups, as well as members of the Chagossian community, in order to ensure a plurality of non-aligned voices, and in order to address their needs, particularly those articulated in the Democratic Statement and Chagossian Bill of Rights (Chagos Islanders Welfare Group, Allen 2018: 314–316). In 2021 and 2022 the group was focused particularly on (successfully) securing an amendment to the Nationality and Borders Bill to extend British citizenship to all Chagossian descendants.[8] CV continues to campaign on critical issues such as the right of return to the archipelago, as well as indigenous and human rights more broadly, and they engage regularly with parliamentarians, government ministers, civil servants and academics at local, national and international level, including at the United Nations.[9] CV works alongside other Chagossian groups in Mauritius, the Seychelles, the UK, and France, and offers support where possible to see these groups achieve their own aims. In addition, given that contested sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago remains a live issue at the time of writing, CV also collaborates on joint statements and open letters directed at international organisations such as the United Nations, the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea, and Human Rights Watch.[10]

7 For further details, see https://chagossianvoices.org/.
8 https://chagossianvoices.org/campaign-for-uk-citizenship/.
9 https://chagossianvoices.org/who-are-chagossian-voices/.
10 https://chagossianvoices.org/advocacy/.

4 Where power lies

The discussion so far has revolved around researcher-community relations in general, and the role of these relations in a wider practice of good ethical conduct. We have also argued that CBR-type methods might provide linguistics with a flexible framework for improving both, notwithstanding ongoing debates in the field regarding the best approaches. To offer a novel contribution to the debate, in what follows we focus on the design and subsequent implementation of funded research projects. This is a pinch-point phase in the collaborative process where tensions and issues reviewed in Section 2 emerge, and a phase where adopting a more ethically informed approach might be most beneficial to all parties.

Before introducing our own observations, it is first important to stress that researched communities will have been approached previously by many different kinds of social actors with very disparate intentions, the conduct and outcomes of which may have been either positive or negative (or both). In this respect, both LAH and CV, and the communities they serve, have benefited from a number of fruitful collaborations with universities, and there has been engagement with academic partners across disciplines and sectors on issues that these communities see as pressing. There is, in short, a good amount of exemplary practice. However, while positive engagement and outcomes were reported in this project, we focus here on scenarios that have sometimes led to a significant amount of distrust in communities towards institutions (of all kinds) as this is an area where lessons need to be learned. In what follows we synthesise these discussions to identify practical steps forward for the field.

4.1 Power asymmetries

When it comes to collaborations with universities, particularly within the context of research project design, a first issue that emerges concerns power asymmetries, which can manifest in various ways. Both LAH and CV have highlighted how expressions of interest often come from postgraduate students or Early Career Researchers (ECRs) rather than permanent or senior faculty members. Concurrently, the impression is of a short-term interest linked to individuals' specific and time-bounded investigations, rather than a broader institutional or community interest. This clearly matches what can be observed in many academic environments, where increasing pressure is put on ECRs to deliver on the sorts of activities and outputs often required for probation and promotion. This also highlights a hierarchical

structure within the academy where younger members of staff are expected to meet the demands of a changing funding and research landscape, all the while paying greater attention to public engagement.

The other side of the coin is represented by a parallel hierarchy among community organisations approached for research projects, whereby only the most prominent associations, often representing only a minority of the community, tend to be approached for collaboration. In this respect, genuine representativity of voice in projects of national and international scope is a cause for concern in the communities with whom we work. This can have particularly nefarious and internally divisive impacts, including, e.g., smear or disinformation campaigns where projects are embarked upon that are not sanctioned by the most prominent groups, and where community members are pushed into a position of taking sides, or being made fearful of the outcomes of intended work even though said work might in fact benefit them. Academics entering such communities will likely not be aware of these internal divisions.

4.2 Academic gatekeeping

Furthermore, not unrelated to power, it is possible to identify broader issues associated with academic gatekeeping and a specific type of research that has predominantly benefited a limited number of individuals and their academic careers. One particularly egregious case regarding the Chagossian community involved the organisation of an international conference centred on legal issues surrounding the Chagos Archipelago, but to which just one member of the Chagossian community was initially invited to participate. It was only after protest from the Chagossian community that invitations were extended to a greater number of community members. This episode, far from being an isolated example, shows how, in general, there has been a very narrow interpretation of what 'knowledge' of these communities is, itself an example of how academia continues to reify only particular kinds of knowledge and knowledge production, to the exclusion of community members. There are even cases in which more prominent academics have taken to dismissing the views of Chagossians altogether, particularly on social media, amplifying instead particular narratives from the most prominent community group. Further still, some academics have been unwilling to discuss their work with the community when invited to do so, and in so doing locked the very community that is the focus of their work out of the conversation altogether.

4.3 Knowledge production

The issue of academic gatekeeping and broader controversial assumptions about knowledge production emerges particularly clearly in relation to funded research projects. Both LAH and CV identified cases in which they were presented with projects about their communities as a *fait accompli*: that is, the projects' aims, scope, methods, and intended outcomes were predetermined, with little discussion among the community members themselves.[11] Moreover, as we have said above, the proposed collaborations have often tended to be short-term in nature, and very much linked to the time horizon associated with project funds (as set out in funding applications), with no consideration paid to possible shared objectives beyond the completion of the immediate goals of the project. In addition to the ideological implications of this kind of dynamic, based on an extractive logic which sees these collaborations as an exchange of services in which the community provides the 'data' and the academics produce the 'knowledge', various practical issues arise. Among them, funding is one area that can be a particularly sensitive issue for these communities, especially when they may struggle financially. Yet it is also an important area to which academics can meaningfully contribute, not least where communities are under-resourced. When researchers come into a community with well-funded projects that have not been co-designed with the community and there has been no discussion of how resources should be allocated and funding spent, community members may feel exploited and overlooked (or may feel that the money should have been used to benefit the community more directly). CV members noted the contrast between two academic research projects in which the community were asked to produce and share cultural knowledge and experience. The first project, directed by a senior academic, and which attracted substantial funding, was conceived by people outside the community and in consultation with some community leaders who were not fully accepted by many on the ground. Once said project was introduced to the community, it created resentment because it appeared to be a *fait accompli* where community members were invited to share cultural knowledge and skills in settings and frameworks created by outsiders who were thought to be profiting from the exercise. The large amount of funding was resented by culture bearers who would have liked to have had the time, space, and facilities to develop their own projects and remain in full control of their creative output and cultural knowledge. This can be contrasted with an architectural research project undertaken by a postgraduate student which had, by comparison, attracted very little research funding. However, the student took the time to meet ordinary

11 Cf. Roman-Velazquez et al. (2021: 19) for similar remarks from their participatory research experience with the London-based charity Latin Elephant.

members of the community at a lunch club before initiating any plans. They worked to gain the community's personal trust and confronted their misgivings about ownership of the scheme by producing a contract about shared ownership of the knowledge and the outcomes of the research. The participants became enthusiastically involved once they knew it would be their project. Moreover, the researcher and participants produced a collective manifesto articulating their aims and ideals about *kouma nou pou viv dan Chagos dime* [how can we live in Chagos tomorrow]. By providing this example, we do not mean to place the sole responsibility for full and long-term engagement on individual researchers. On the contrary, wider institutional reform in how research is conceptualised and conducted within universities is needed, including a specific recognition of the need for sustained research and support when working with marginalised communities.

The above discussion also highlights that there can be limited transparency in terms of the finer aspects of funding and resource allocation. When paired with an inflexible governance framework for the dissemination of such resources, the combined effect is not a recipe for transparent collaboration (see discussion in Section 6.2). Emerging from our work was the view that any collaboration has to be seen as a joint enterprise, where a plurality of views are aired openly and criticisms or reflections received, with a view to actioning the concerns raised. Crucially, this has to be done at the earliest stages of conceptualisation of a funded research project. In general, academics have the responsibility to show and articulate how the proposed research can be beneficial for all parties involved (viz., the communities, their representatives, any third-party organisations, as well as academics) and to implement any necessary changes to mitigate any imbalances identified by the communities during the consultation process.

Having reviewed a number of challenges that emerged from our community-bridging and knowledge exchange exercise on collaboration and good ethical conduct, we turn next to complementing the discussion by reporting community members' direct views about such initiatives, which are taken from previous and ongoing work that we have conducted together.

5 Wider community reflections on collaboration

Notwithstanding the challenges outlined above, we have observed genuine community interest in the types of collaborations described here, and, particularly, in community-based academic projects incorporating investigations on language. For instance, in recent survey work conducted by a subset of our team among first-generation Latin Americans in London, 93 % of respondents (n = 53) strongly agreed that projects on linguistic research can be useful for the UK Latin American

community. More specifically, open comments highlighted the role these can play for community visibility (1); valorising ethnicity and cultural heritage (2); enhancement or development of Latin American identity (3); a sense of belonging to a community (4).

(1) a. *Because this helps the community to continue to strengthen and become more and more visible.* (Amandys)[12]
b. *Because projects, especially academic ones, make us visible to the English society.* (Kari Sol)
c. *To feel recognized in the UK.* (Dani)

(2) *Because we have to be recognized as an ethnic minority to be considered.* (Javiera)

(3) *I think the Latin community in London has a lot of potential, which has been wasted because many people don't talk about being Latino. Likewise, I feel that many second and third generation children do not know what to do or how to feel about being Latino, and this research will help them develop that sense of identity.* (Crespo)

(4) a. *Because they would unite us more as Latin Americans. And it is also a way to be proud of our roots.* (Paola)
b. *It helps us be closer to our community.* (Anonymous)

It is also important to note that expressions of scepticism were voiced, as exemplified in (5), where a Latin American respondent to the above-mentioned survey emphasised the perceived lack of tangible outcomes from linguistics projects of the kind discussed in this paper.[13]

(5) *I haven't seen any results yet. UK universities have mistaken conceptions of Latin American identity. I did a thesis on Latin American identity in London and the comments were from English professors answering that Latin American identity does not exist. For this reason I distanced myself from the English academy and I do not see policies towards Latinos due to the lack of Latin ethnicity in the majority of the boroughs of London.* (Anonymous)

12 As recent work in research ethics has shown, anonymising research participants can be disempowering and run contrary to the goals of a wider decolonial agenda (see, e.g., Driem 2016). In this study, participants were given the choice of waiving anonymity altogether or providing a pseudonym for the purpose of publication.

13 In excerpts (1)–(6) respondents explained why they think (or not) that projects of the type discussed in this paper can be useful for the Latin American community of the UK.

Relatedly, within both communities represented here, the preservation of heritage languages and identities within homes and communities emerged as a recurrent theme, and has been identified as a specific area that could benefit from community-based linguistics (6), especially in light of a shared perception of inadequate resources to support bilingual education among younger generations (7).[14]

(6) a. *These projects are extremely important for us for the following reasons: Value Latin American linguistic differences, learn about our cultures, customs, our common characteristics and differences. These projects help us reflect on the importance of continuing to speak and value Spanish.* (Maria)

b. *It helps us understand the importance of maintaining our mother tongue and celebrating the richness of our language based on the variants in different countries.* (Magdalena García)

(7) a. *Projects that promote the teaching of Spanish in a more complete way for the children of migrants. What you learn at home is not enough.* (Magdalena García)

b. *There are many doubts about children's language development, how to ensure that bilingual children can speak correct Spanish when they grow up in the UK.* (Anonymous)

c. *Perhaps,* [projects] *about the use of Spanish at home with young children. Investigate the type of relationship between the family and the educational setting. Do a project to encourage family participation in the children's education and ways in which you could actively help children be more exposed to Spanish both at home and at school.* (Vicky)

In a similar vein, though for more pressing reasons given the wider socio-political context, safeguarding the community language is one of several immediate priorities for the Chagossian community, as it represents an integral aspect of their identity and intangible cultural heritage (8), particularly in face of attempts to negate or erase their status as an indigenous group as sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago continues to be contested.[15]

14 In excerpt (7) respondents explained what types of community-based projects with a linguistic focus they would recommend.

15 See most recently https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/article/2024/may/02/chagos-islanders-fear-loss-of-identity-as-birth-certificates-altered-to-remove-disputed-homeland.

(8) *We are losing our culture. 56 years away from our homeland we are losing everything sadly yes we are losing everything. When my grandkids go to Seychelles, they can't communicate with my mum. For me it's hard when my mum says something they ask "Nana what is she saying". I have to translate. It's not good. It happened also in Mauritius.* (CC1F1)[16]

Similar views about collaborations between universities and organisations were expressed by LAH employees and organisation volunteers who took part in a separate, specifically targeted survey. Interestingly, when asked why they think (or not) that LAH can benefit from collaborations with universities, respondents offered predominantly positive views (9). However, many of the concerns discussed earlier also surfaced, as encapsulated in (10).[17]

(9) *Absolutely, collaborating with universities opens the doors to the academic world and it would be very interesting if LAH could collaborate in research.* (LAH employee)

(10) *Yes, however and in each case* [collaborations with universities] *should be carefully observed in relation to the purposes of such relationships, carefully studying the achievement of the objectives, their means and specifically, in detail, who and to what extent their beneficiaries are.* (LAH employee)

Both LAH and CV share a common objective regarding changing linguistic attitudes in education, which they believe can also be addressed through collaborations with academics. As speakers of local varieties of Spanish, on the one hand, and Kreol and French, on the other, members of both communities who are in (or have children enrolled in), or who have been through, the UK education system have reported episodes in which they (or their kin) experienced prescriptive attitudes in the classroom, where Latin Americans' and Chagossians' varieties of Spanish and French are taken to be 'incorrect' versions of national languages. This led to bizarre scenarios in which students were automatically enrolled in the bottom sets (i.e., low-competence classes) despite being native speakers. Illustrative of this are those observations taken from Allen (2018: 125), below, based on his experience as a teacher in an English secondary school that a large number of Chagossian students attended.

16 Taken from pilot interview work in Crawley.

17 In excerpts (9)–(10) respondents explained why they think (or not) that LAH can benefit from collaborations with universities.

(11) a. *I think it was: they don't speak English so let's put them all in bottom sets, and a lot of them were just dumped in bottom sets and it was assumed that because their English wasn't good they couldn't actually do the work.* (Mathematics teacher, Allen 2018: 125)

b. *French seemed very simple. There were four sets and me and Emmanuel were in set four. Sometimes we were even correcting the teacher. The whole class laughed when man Emanuel did that. 'Cos she was showing something and Emmanuel turned round to me and said … "is that even right?"* (Chagossian student, Allen 2018: 125)

This is a particularly pressing matter, as the stigma which is sometimes attached to different linguistic varieties in schools, sometimes even resulting in the sanctioning of students (12), can negatively affect students' multicultural identities and can discourage them from embracing their home languages (13).

(12) a. *I actually witnessed this from the music room corridor and heard him shout "Stop speaking French".* (Allen 2018: 160)

b. *The senior leader threw them out of the building completely … because they were speaking Kreol.* (Allen 2018: 162)

(13) *I know people who, despite having Latino parents, do not feel connected or are not interested in exploring that part of them because they do not have that space to learn, ask questions about the culture in a group and prefer to separate themselves from that culture or hide it so as not to receive prejudiced comments at school or work.* (LAH employee)

This is, in turn, the reflection of a wider issue having to do with the notions of standard and prestige which often emerge beyond the classroom. Latin American respondents in our survey work reported various episodes of linguistic discrimination, as illustrated in excerpts (14) provided in response to the question "Has anyone ever told you that your variety of Spanish is not 'correct'?". Further, community members expressed a positive view on the role that community-based projects can play in tackling these issues (15).

(14) a. *Yes, they have told me that I speak ugly, that it is not understandable, that it is ordinary, that I express myself very slowly. I felt discriminated and undervalued culturally.* (Christine S)

b. *Yes, an English person with a Spanish mother and I felt discriminated against because no matter how much I explained that they were different, he argued that Spanish from Spain was correct and that mine could not be called Spanish.* (Mariana)

c. *Yes, my secondary school classmates because of my Colombian accent when speaking Spanish. They made me feel inferior to them.* (Nicole)

(15) *I feel that many second and third generation children do not know what to do or how to feel about being Latino, and this research will help them develop that sense of identity.* (Crespo)

In sum, in this section we have brought to light some of the communities' views about collaborative projects involving linguistic minorities, highlighting the positive role that these can play in relation to visibility, identity, feeling of belonging, language preservation, as well as for changing linguistic attitudes and tackling language-related discrimination in the classroom and beyond. These aspirations held by speakers are not incompatible with the work conducted by formal linguists. Rather, as basic principles of the CBR framework highlight, it is important that common goals and objectives are arrived at, and the goals of formal linguists need not necessarily match those of the community if they accept such work as part of a wider agenda (see Cameron et al. 1992: 22).

In what follows, we tie together our observations in the communities with which and for whom we work, as well as our own reflections from the knowledge exchange and community-bridging exercise, to offer some practical recommendations for prospective formal linguistic research projects using principles from CBR methods.

6 Towards a standard protocol for community-based funding bids

As the above discussion has shown, collaborations between academics, communities, and community organisations involve several challenges, especially when partnerships are established within the scope of a funded research project and the narrow governance frameworks by which research funds are dispensed and overseen. Tensions often arise due to power imbalances between the actors involved (viz., the communities and their representatives, the organisations, the academics), because of problems associated with academic gatekeeping, as well as narrow assumptions about knowledge production and other extractive behaviours for which linguistics (not unlike other disciplines in the Humanities) is well-known (Montoya 2024). At the same time, communities have expressed a genuine interest in collaborative projects, given the positive contributions that they recognise can be made to the visibility of their communities as linguistic minorities; to the preservation of their varieties; and to fostering a change in relation to negative linguistic attitudes and language discrimination in the classroom and beyond. Ultimately, by exposing the

above-mentioned issues, these collaborations offer scholars an important opportunity to rethink and critically evaluate the process of designing a research project, thus making an important contribution to wider efforts on the democratisation of knowledge and resources (see also Czaykowska-Higgins 2009; Plumb et al. 2024).

In light of these considerations and drawing from our experiences, in what follows we offer a number of recommendations for what we consider to be integral to good ethical conduct in collaboration, with specific reference to the design and development of funded research projects in formal linguistics involving third-sector organisations who represent minority and minoritised linguistic groups. Without claiming to be exhaustive, these proposed guidelines can form the basis of a standard protocol which can be used to work towards mitigating tensions, ensuring good ethical conduct, and maximising research benefits for all parties involved.

6.1 Action plan and Memorandum of Understanding

As the CBR literature has made clear, the design of any funded collaboration between researchers and communities should begin with consultations aimed at identifying shared objectives. However, as we have seen, a criticism of this approach has also been that it can be overly informal, thereby exposing the process to risks related to power imbalances and the marginalisation of voices, particularly those not necessarily associated with well-known groups in the community. One way to mitigate this would be to co-produce an action plan in which shared objectives can be formalised and made publicly available. This could also include a more formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in which it is agreed that all the parties involved will use their expertise to mutual benefit in the furtherance of the research aims of all members involved. This would further ensure that there is recognition of multiple forms of expertise (see above), which we see as an important step in correcting a great deal of the extractive practices in formal linguistics (i.e., the exclusive access of academics, usually from dominant or non-marginalised demographics, to legitimate knowledge production). As we understand it, the MoU should set out the broad objectives of the partnership (e.g., facilitate research linkages and information exchange, joint organisation of public engagement events, collaboration to develop relevant funding bids) and ensure compliance by all parties involved regarding, e.g., data sovereignty, data access concerns, and related issues. In our experience of working together thus far, it is not inconceivable that universities would be hesitant about establishing a MoU. One solution that we propose here is to stress to senior management that a MoU can be drafted which is not necessarily legally binding (aside from less controversial clauses concerning data protection), but rather can serve as a formal agreement of shared practice. However, this is an

important action from the perspective of community organisations since a MoU represents an institutional commitment that can bolster the significance of such collaborations in any final reports to funders.

While it may be challenging (or indeed impossible) to completely neutralise power asymmetries in research of this nature, an approach guided by, or informed by CBR principles (i.e., here an approach that integrates consultations into the research design from a project's inception), including the two practical steps outlined in this section can help mitigate gatekeeping effects that emerge when communities are approached with a funded project already approved (cf. also Roman-Velazquez et al. 2021: 19).

6.2 Rethinking allocation of resources

We have seen that part of the distrust that emerges in the communities with whom we work relates to a lack of clarity about how resources are proposed and allocated. Several measures can be taken to ensure that funding is invested equitably in researched communities. First, as our discussion of CBR methods above makes clear, members of the community can and should be invited to join project advisory boards, and funding should be allocated to compensate members' participation in this service. Such an approach will present challenges. In the UK, for instance, recent work has shown that institutional governance frameworks (including funding bodies) create barriers to the dissemination of research funds in communities (Chetty et al. 2024), and some funding schemes do not allow funds to be allocated specifically to 'project partners' (e.g., UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships Round 8 Guidance for Academic-hosted Applicants).[18] Therefore such an approach also calls for creative thinking in the process of establishing how resources can be equitably distributed to research partners, and community members should be entitled to volunteer ideas of their own about this, as well as about wider aims and objectives which are of specific interest to the community. A virtuous example comes from Akumbu (2024), who proposes that community overheads not necessarily related to language work could also be met in proposed research budgets (see also Sarvasy 2025, on "equitable budgets"). Second, where it is feasible to do so, we recommend as a common practice the hiring of a community assistant, in addition to any research assistants, that is a member of the community with relevant experience for the purposes of the project

18 A Project Partner is defined under this scheme as "a third-party person or organisation who is not employed on the grant, but provides specific contributions either in cash or in kind, to the project" (https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/future-leaders-fellowships-round-8/, last accessed December 2024).

(we interpret this broadly as any expertise, linguistic or other relevant expertise) who may not necessarily hold a qualification recognised by the academic institution. By removing specific academic requirements typically imposed by top-down governance frameworks (such as the need for a PhD in order to be in receipt of research funding, or to be a named collaborator on a project), the position can be opened to a broader array of community members whose lived experiences can fruitfully complement the academic experience of the principal investigator and any research assistants. This means that some of the funding needs to be invested in the training of a community member (or other forms of infrastructure building that a given community sees as important, see below) who may not otherwise be able to access research activities via more traditional routes, with their narrow, and often UK-specific, academic requirements. This can also address one of the issues observed in both of our communities – that is, a lack of involvement in research activities of researchers with lived experience and first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by the communities under investigation.[19] In this respect, building relevant infrastructure within the collaborating organisations and the communities they represent should be of paramount importance. For example, a pressing matter for LAH is grant capture. As a charity, part of their income relies on funding applications, whose outcome also depends on LAH's ability to articulate their objectives and to present compelling qualitative and quantitative evidence to support their case. Nevertheless, there are instances when LAH staff do not possess the expertise to carry out the relevant research to support grant capture, such as using data processing tools to present and analyse information in a suitable format. Similarly, CV also articulated in our exercise a need for better data on language and educational attainment. In order to address these needs, and to add value to collaborations, academics should, where appropriate, include opportunities for professional development for staff, including training on data collection, funding bids, as well as strategies for successful public engagement where communities have, or articulate, a need. A key outcome here should be the empowerment of community members in the process of knowledge production, enabling them to produce their own research.[20] All of this entails an important conceptual shift in roles: as articulated by many other colleagues before us, linguistics must move away from viewing research participants merely as objects of investigation, to thinking in terms of participants as active partners. Equally, academics must transition from knowledge gatekeepers to allies. In other words, a shift in the conceptualisation of the nature of these

19 Good examples where this has worked well elsewhere include the Natives4Linguistics project (https://natives4linguistics.wordpress.com/, last accessed November 2024).

20 This is a model already embraced by some organisations, which, instead of relying on collaborations with external academics, have developed their own hub of internal researchers.

collaborations is needed: from short-term contacts leveraged for data extraction towards a longer-term partnership with shared objectives to work on beyond the lifespan of research grants.

6.3 Some elements of a proposed standard protocol for formal linguistics

We summarise the above discussion with the following recommendations, which can serve as the foundation for a broader protocol on ethical collaborative research design and implementation in formal linguistics. Academic linguists should:

1. approach organisations and communities at the initial stages of planning an application and initiate consultations in order to identify key concerns, problems as well as possible shared objectives; depending on the nature of the project, these may coincide with the project's overall objectives or may complement and inform other research questions (e.g., of a more theoretical nature);
2. agree on an action plan which, where feasible, should include longer-term objectives going beyond the lifespan of the funded project;
3. sign a Memorandum of Understanding, formally laying out the objectives of the partnership and ensuring compliance by all parties involved in the parameters of the study;
4. include members of the community on project advisory boards;
5. invite community assistants onto the project team;
6. offer opportunities for professional development and capacity building for the organisations and communities in the pursuit of shared goals, i.e., to empower communities to produce their own research;
7. ensure the co-production of a range of (non-)academic outputs with community members, which can benefit all involved;
8. ensure that less obvious benefits which accrue to academic researchers through their work in these communities are also conferred to all involved in the work (e.g., via publication bylines);
9. commit to incorporating into postgraduate training good ethical conduct (using CBR principles as a guide) as part of research practice in formal linguistics.

7 Conclusions

This paper set out to investigate what good ethical conduct in linguistic research might look like from the perspective of communities with whom we collaborate. After reviewing ongoing debates about the rather extractive norms that various

strands of linguistics have been known for, we have focused our attention on the critical phase of any collaboration: the design of funded projects. In doing so we have foregrounded the voices of those actors in this process who typically lack opportunities to participate in these conversations. Drawing from the experiences of Latin Americans and Chagossians living in the UK, along with insights from two representative organisations, we have explored themes concerning power imbalances, academic gatekeeping, and the dynamics of knowledge production. Specific examples have been highlighted to illustrate how negative experiences have impacted upon successful collaborations and, ultimately, the process of knowledge production itself. By advocating for CBR-type methods in formal linguistics projects, and by illustrating the sorts of scenarios that can arise when communities are not intimately involved, these examples and experiences effectively address, without requiring further explanations, some of the criticisms outlined in Section 2. Nevertheless, several positive aspects were also brought to light. Specifically, despite the challenges outlined, our surveys and ongoing consultations underscored a genuine interest within the communities in academic collaborations, that are viewed as positive opportunities to raise visibility and contribute to several linguistic endeavours, including language preservation and fostering positive linguistic attitudes in educational settings and beyond. To encapsulate and build upon these observations, we have provided a number of recommendations, specifically related to the design and development of funded projects, which can serve as the foundation for a broader protocol for ethical collaborative research in formal linguistics. The essence of this proposed protocol and, more broadly, of successful collaboration in the context discussed here, lies in what we might call a *principle of sovereignty of voice*, i.e., prioritising the use of methods and strategies that are sensitive to local conditions, wants, and needs, guided by and responsive to the community.

In conclusion, our contention has been that striving for a research design that is beneficial to the community on their terms should be the primary objective of project design inasmuch as it is both ethically compelling and achievable. Without any claims of exhaustiveness, we hope this article will act as a catalyst for further conversations on ethical collaborative research in linguistics.

Acknowledgements: We thank first and foremost all participants who kindly offered their time in taking part in our consultations. We also thank Raúl Valdivia-Murgueytio (Nottingham Trent University) and Carlos Huascar Tapia Montes (formerly of Latin American House) for their contributions to the community work discussed in this article.

Research funding: This work was supported by two BA/Leverhulme Small Research Grants: SRG21\211281 (PI: Norma Schifano), and SRG2324\240017 (PI: Jonathan

Kasstan); an AHRC IAA (BIR 22–23 P004; PI: Norma Schifano); the University of Birmingham's Impactful Researchers Development Fund; and the University of Westminster's School of Humanities Research Fund.

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