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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Linguists Grapple with Professional Ethics**

(Washington, DC) – The Linguistic Society of America (LSA) adopted its first-ever Ethics Statement last month, after several years of dialogue and numerous rounds of revision. Other scholarly professional societies (including linguistic societies) have created ethics documents in years past. But the recent movement to preserve endangered languages has brought to the fore the complex issues that arise when linguists interact with communities and research participants, providing a timely opportunity for the U.S. linguistics community to formalize its standards for professional behavior.

In settling on their statement, the members of the LSA had to grapple with an array of issues that delayed arriving at consensus. As noted by the Chair of the LSA’s Ethics Committee, Dr. Lise Dobrin, “Linguists use a variety of methods to study human language, and that variety makes it hard to pin down a common set of guidelines that all linguists can agree to. The challenges faced by the experimentalist differ from those of the community fieldworker or the linguist developing computer models. But we all share a professional commitment to doing our work ethically.”

To help reach a national consensus, the LSA circulated a draft Ethics Statement in 2008, gathering comments from LSA members through the innovative means of a blog. A lively electronic conversation ensued, with members offering feedback that influenced the statement’s final form. The blog is now being redesigned as a discussion forum that will allow linguists to explore ethical problems with their peers. On it linguists will be able to discuss questions such as whether eliciting grammaticality judgments for syntactic research requires IRB review under the federal regulations, or what is the best course of action when respecting one language consultant’s wish to be recognized in publications reveals the identity of another consultant who wishes to remain anonymous.

The LSA’s Ethics Statement builds on and complements the ethics policies of neighboring disciplines such as oral history, anthropology, and psychology. The LSA’s Ethics Committee views the statement as a dynamic document that will evolve over time to meet the changing needs of linguists and the speakers of the languages they study.

A copy of the LSA Ethics Statement is available online at:  
[http://lsadc.org/info/pdf\\_files/Ethics\\_Statement.pdf](http://lsadc.org/info/pdf_files/Ethics_Statement.pdf).

*The Linguistic Society of America is the largest national professional society representing the field of linguistics. Its mission is to advance the scientific study of language.*