InterGedi Comprehensive Policy on Ethical Use of Digital Sources in Research

Research endeavours always bring along considerations of transparency, rigour and excellence, so both the process and product(s) of an investigation should comply with ethical guidelines ensuring the validity and credibility of the findings and the researcher(s) behind them. At InterGedi, we are well aware of these premises and we have a comprehensive policy on the ethical use of digital data in our research work. Our approach complies with the perspective of "micro-ethical practices", which "are customised to manage ethical dilemmas in an emergent manner, as opposed to subscribing to a one-size-fits-all approach to ensuring that ethical practices are adhered to" (De Costa et al., 2019: 123). As follows, a list of negotiated statements among InterGedi members and controversial issues due to the digital nature of our objects of analysis are discussed. We hope this will purport to raise awareness of the ethical needs our research group ought to deal with and, subsequently, justify our research decisions in the pursuit of our research goals.

1. Purpose and Scope

We are committed to the ethical and responsible utilization of personal and public data as well as digital sources in our research enterprises within the field of Applied Linguistics and its different areas and approaches. This has been an object of growing inquiry in several manuals for the past years as it is paramount to establish guidelines and boundaries in their use (e.g., De Costa, 2015; Pakhiti et al., 2018).

   We are dedicated to upholding ethical standards, legal compliance, and participant welfare across our international research group. Due to the scope of our work, the concerns and problems derived from data treatment and ethical issues encompass information sourced, principally, from professional, scholarly, and scientific domains. More specifically, they stem from working with digital texts such as websites and social media platforms, which embody new and diverse data types, text sources and compilation techniques. As contended by Spilioti & Tagg (2017: 163), these "challenge existing approaches to research ethics and raise significant and difficult questions for researchers who design, undertake and disseminate applied linguistic research in and about digital environments".

2. Source Verification and Reliability

We prioritize the credibility and reliability of the data obtained and the digital sources scrutinised. These can be sourced from various disciplinary fields (e.g., scholarly, scientific, corporate, professional) as well as from fully public, semi-public and private spheres. We rigorously verify the authenticity of materials, specifically through iterative web-focused studies and peer discussion. Cross-referencing information from reputable sources and participant responses helps us mitigate potential biases and ensure the integrity of our research.

3. Citation and Acknowledgment

We recognize the importance of proper citation and acknowledgment in research. Regardless of the source of information (e.g., professional journals, scholarly publications, social media platforms, participant insights), we ensure all materials are referenced appropriately in our research outlets and materials in order to recognize the

contributions of creators and participants. This practice fosters transparency and respect for intellectual property rights. Specific codes are used to identify the sources of information and ways to access further details about those sources are provided, for example, by directing to our research group website, where we hold accountability and visibility of our work.

4. Intellectual Property Rights

Respecting intellectual property rights is fundamental to our research practices. We refrain from unauthorized use, reproduction, or distribution of data stemming from private sources of information. We secure reference and citation of data coming from public sources of information. We also take into account the differences in intellectual property rights and data processing and treatment between individual and legal entities. Obtaining proper licenses or permissions ensures our compliance with legal agreements and upholds the rights of content creators and participants.

5. Data Privacy and Security

Protecting data privacy and security is paramount in our research endeavours. We implement robust measures to safeguard information, which include anonymization, secure storage, and adherence to ethical protocols for data handling and sharing (e.g., Code of Ethics and Code of Research Practices of the Universidad de Zaragoza; Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Moreover, we endorse the ethical principles forwarded by other institutions, such as American Psychology Association (APA), Linguistic Society of America (LSA), British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL), and ELSEVIER publishing company. We attempt to strike a thoughtful balance between these measures and our contention to comply with Open Access and Open Science policies. Ethical clashes that are not easily solved arise in the decision of "when to prioritize ethical concerns of data as communicative resources over data as people" (Georgakopoulou, 2017: 180). Thus, information may be publicly uploaded and shared about our corpora and databases, predominantly those of a fully public nature, whereas the confidentiality and privacy of participants in different roles and at different stages of our investigations are systematically ensured.

6. Open Access and Fair Use

We strive to embrace the principles of Open Access initiatives and adhere to fair use policies in our research projects (e.g., Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities; ENJOI Manifesto). This promotes the ethical and equitable dissemination of knowledge while respecting the rights of creators and participants. In other words, it is our aim to "balance the rights of subjects (as authors, as research participants, as people) with the social benefits of research and researchers' rights to conduct research" (Markham & Buchanan, 2012: 4). Likewise, transparency and documentation are integral to our research methodology. We maintain meticulous records of permissions obtained, data sources utilised, and methodologies employed. This applies to data from professional and informal domains obtained out of digital text analysis and ethnographic work, such as interviews, surveys, questionnaires, and focus groups involving real participants. Thus, we foster reproducibility, replicability and trust in our research findings.

7. Training and Awareness

We prioritize ongoing training and awareness regarding the ethical use of digital sources and participant interactions. We ensure all members stay informed about legal

and ethical considerations, in general, and about the advances and decisions taken within the research group, in particular. Active participation in training initiatives strengthens our collective commitment to ethical research practices. Our particular focus is on the (digital) texts scrutinised, the medium employed, the participants involved, the research tools designed and the outputs created.

8. Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

We encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing within and beyond the research group. We actively seek opportunities to collaborate with other researchers and institutions, fostering a culture of interdisciplinary cooperation. Through open communication and sharing of findings, we contribute to the advancement of knowledge and promote innovation in our respective fields.

By embodying these comprehensive principles, InterGedi pledges to adhere to all relevant regulations and frameworks governing the use of digital sources in our research. Whether it is data from scholarly publications, digital texts, or participant interactions, we ensure our practices align with ethical norms and guidelines within the national academic context in which we operate. InterGedi reaffirms its dedication to ethical, responsible, and impactful research, spanning professional, scholarly, and scientific spheres, and mainly concerning the exploitation of digital texts and ethnographically-oriented instruments. We strive to continuously uphold the highest standards of integrity, respect, and ethical conduct in all aspects of our research activities.

References

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