Linguistics

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http://ling.yale.edu
M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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Fields of Study

The Department of Linguistics embraces an integrative approach to the study of language, based on the premise that an understanding of the human language faculty arises only through the combination of insights from the development of explicit formal theories with careful descriptive and experimental work. Members of the department offer courses and conduct research in which theoretical inquiry proceeds in partnership with historical and comparative studies, fieldwork, experimental work, cognitive neuroscience, and computational and mathematical modeling. Faculty expertise includes all of the major domains of linguistics (phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics) and spans a wide range of languages.

Special Requirements for the Ph.D. Degree

Course Work

The conception of linguistics embraced by the Yale Ph.D. program requires that students receive training that is both deep in its coverage of areas of linguistic inquiry and broad in the range of methodological approaches. The course work requirements are designed to accomplish these complementary goals. This course work includes a set of courses designed to expose students to core ideas, together with courses equipping students with a range of methodologies in linguistic research.

During their first five terms, students must complete a minimum of twelve term courses at the graduate level. During the initial two years of course work, students must receive at least three grades of H (= Honors). Two or more grades below HP (= High Pass) during the initial two-year period constitute grounds for dismissal from the Ph.D. program. As per Graduate School general regulations, grades of F cannot be counted toward degree requirements.

Foundational courses

This requirement ensures that students achieve breadth in several linguistic subfields. Students take six courses in four or more subfields of linguistics. The following courses satisfy this requirement: LING 612, Language Change; LING 636, Articulatory Phonology; LING 631, Neurolinguistics, or LING 617, Language and Mind; LING 635, Phonology II; LING 654, Syntax II; LING 664, Semantics II; LING 680, Morphology.

Students will decide on their courses, in consultation with the director of graduate studies (DGS) and other faculty, when they arrive on campus. Other sufficiently advanced courses may also satisfy the requirement.

Methodology courses

For the methodology requirement, students must take three relevant courses. The following courses, which are offered regularly by the department, qualify, but other courses may as well, to be determined in consultation with the adviser and DGS: LING 600, Experimentation in Linguistics; LING 619, The Evolution of Language and Culture; LING 624, Mathematics of Language; LING 627, Language and Computation I; LING 631, Neurolinguistics; LING 636, Articulatory Phonology; LING 641, Field Methods; an advanced course in statistics (e.g., S&DS 538, S&DS 563, S&DS 661, or PSYC 518).

One of the methodology courses must be taken during the first year of the program, and two must be completed by the end of the second year. Courses cannot simultaneously satisfy the foundational and methodology requirements.

Seminar courses

Graduate students are active participants in department reading groups and seminars. Students should participate in three advanced seminars in which they read the original literature of the field and write a research paper. With permission of their adviser and the DGS, students may enroll in the appropriate 790s-numbered LING course and count active participation in a department reading group, including the submission of a final research paper, as satisfying this requirement.
Research

The primary focus of a Ph.D. program is independent research. In the course of our Ph.D. program, students carry out cutting-edge linguistic research, culminating in the completion of a dissertation. To help students in the transition from “consuming” to also “producing” linguistic research, there are a number of structures and requirements in place.

Research adviser and first-year directed readings

By the end of the first term of the program, students find a department faculty member who acts as their research adviser. This choice should be made on the basis of compatibility of research interests and discussions between the student, faculty member, and DGS. Starting from the spring term of the first year, students will, with the help of their adviser, define a topic of research interest, meeting regularly (minimally once every three weeks) and carrying out a series of readings on this topic. Students should keep a research journal, describing their readings and how they fit in with work in the area, and chronicling the development of their thinking about the research topic. It is the faculty’s expectation that this exploration will form the foundation for the research reported in the student’s first qualifying paper (on which see below). Note however that the initial choice of research adviser is not binding: students who want to change their choice of topic or adviser for whatever reason may do so. It is the student’s responsibility to find a suitable adviser, and students are expected to have a faculty adviser at all times during their enrollment in the program. Some students have two faculty co-advisers.

Portfolio

At the conclusion of the first year of the program, students submit to the faculty a portfolio of two research papers, in two distinct areas (as listed above). These papers should demonstrate a student’s mastery of the material in these fields to the level covered in the foundational courses in the area, as well as the ability to identify a significant research question and argue for a possible solution. In short, such papers should be at the level of an excellent term paper, representative of a student’s best work during the first year of coursework. The faculty do not expect students to write papers expressly for the portfolio. Rather, the portfolio will typically consist of term papers from courses taken during the first year in the program. The deadline for submission of these papers is May 10 each year.

Annotated bibliography/research plan

On the basis of the research journal begun during the first year in the program, students will prepare an annotated bibliography and research plan (ABRP) for their first qualifying paper. The ABRP, which should be approximately twenty pages in length, should lay out the question that the student wants to explore, motivating its importance through a presentation and synthesis of relevant past literature on the topic. The deadline for submission of the ABRP is September 10.

Qualifying papers

Once the ABRP has been completed, the student will proceed to work on the qualifying papers (QPs). The goal of the QPs is to develop a student’s ability to conduct independent research in linguistics at the level of current scholarship in two different areas of linguistics. The faculty expect a QP to report on the results of a substantial project, which are written up in a manner consistent with the standards of the field, and to be eventually published in an academic journal or working papers. Students are strongly encouraged to identify a target journal early in the project.

The process of writing the first QP is broken into a number of smaller steps with specific deadlines for each (all during the second year of the program). (1) Students discuss their preliminary results in an appropriate venue (lab meeting, reading group, seminar, etc.) by no later than the end of the fall term. (2) Also by the end of the fall term, the student will send a request for a QP reader to the DGS. This request must include a title and brief summary of the project, and may also request specific faculty members to be involved. On the basis of research area and faculty availability, the DGS will identify a faculty member other than the adviser to serve as a QP reader. This reader will be involved in the ultimate evaluation of the QP once it is completed. Because it is useful to get a range of feedback on one’s work, we encourage students to make the best use of their QP reader by meeting with them and keeping them up to date on the progress of the project. (3) Students must submit a first draft of their QP to their adviser and reader no later than February 1. (4) Students present their work to the department at the yearly “QPFest,” shortly before spring recess. This takes the form of a twenty-minute conference talk to members of the department. (5) Students must submit the final version of the paper to their adviser and reader by March 31. Toward the end of the spring term of the second year, the student should begin to explore possible areas and advisers for the second QP, and must have identified an area and adviser by September 1 of the third year. Students follow the same steps and deadlines listed above for the second QP, this time during the third year.

The second QP should be in a different area of linguistics, with a different adviser, from the first QP. It is particularly important that students make satisfactory progress toward the first QP and complete all work by the relevant deadlines. Failure to do so may result in being asked to leave the program.

Prospectus

No later than the beginning of the sixth term (that is, the spring term of the third year), students choose a dissertation topic and dissertation director. By the beginning of the fourth year, students will present a dissertation prospectus to the entire faculty. The prospectus should lay out clearly the student’s proposed dissertation topic. It should motivate the importance of the topic, present the core idea of the proposed work together with its promise and viability, and demonstrate how this work fits into past research in the area. The prospectus should also identify a dissertation committee. The committee must include at least three faculty members (including the adviser), two of whom must be ladder faculty in the Linguistics department. The prospectus document should be about fifteen pages in length. After it is submitted, the prospectus is defended orally in front of the faculty. Upon successful completion of the prospectus defense, students advance to Ph.D. candidacy.

Dissertation

By the end of the seventh term, students must complete a chapter of the dissertation, together with a detailed outline of the dissertation and comprehensive bibliography. When the dissertation committee approves the chapter and dissertation outline, students are eligible for a University Dissertation Fellowship, which will support them in their fifth year of graduate study. Once advanced to
candidacy, the student will meet with the entire dissertation committee minimally once each term (but with frequency decided by the committee), to evaluate progress toward the dissertation. During this meeting, the committee will complete the committee meeting form, will provide a copy to the student, and will retain one for the department's records.

Students are expected to complete their dissertations by the end of the sixth year. At least one month prior to the dissertation filing date, the completed dissertation must be orally defended. This defense will typically involve a public presentation of the main results of the dissertation and oral examination by the members of the dissertation committee. Committee members must be given the completed dissertation no less than two weeks prior to the date of the defense.

Language Requirement

Students are expected to exhibit some breadth in their knowledge of the languages of the world beyond those most commonly studied and those most similar in structure to the student's first language. LING 641, Field Methods, fulfills this requirement; alternatively, with the permission of the DGS, the student may instead take an appropriate language structure course, or one or more courses characterized as L3 or higher at Yale or the equivalent elsewhere. This requirement must be completed before the prospectus defense, when the student advances to Ph.D. candidacy.

Teaching Fellow/Research Assistant Requirements

The faculty regard teaching experience as an integral part of the graduate training program in Linguistics. All students serve as teaching fellows for a minimum of two terms, beginning in the first term of the third year. In addition, students must complete two additional terms of teaching assistantship. These may be either as a teaching fellow, or through participation in externally supported, supervised research as a research fellow. Research assistantships may be provided by the Linguistics faculty and by various Yale and Yale-affiliated units. Before accepting a research assistantship in fulfillment of this requirement, students must receive approval from the DGS. To be approved, a research assistantship must meet the following criteria:

1. It must be supervised by a Linguistics department faculty member or a faculty member from an affiliated unit, such as Haskins Laboratories or the Yale School of Medicine.
2. It must provide research experience that complements the student's academic plan of study and is related to the student's dissertation research plans.
3. It must provide at least ten hours of experience per week.

If an approved research assistantship is accepted that does not provide a stipend equal to the standard departmental stipend, a University Fellowship will be provided to augment the stipend so as to bring it up to the departmental standard.

MASTER'S DEGREES

M.Phil. Students in the doctoral program who complete all requirements for the Ph.D. apart from the submission of a completed dissertation (but including the presentation and successful defense of a dissertation prospectus) may petition for the M.Phil. degree.

M.A. (en route to the Ph.D.) Students in the doctoral program who successfully complete the course work, examinations, and work samples required by the end of the second year of graduate study (see above) may petition for the M.A. degree.

Program materials are available online at http://ling.yale.edu.

COURSES

LING 500a / ENGL 500a / MDVL 665a, Old English I Emily Thornbury
The essentials of the language, some prose readings, and close study of several celebrated Old English poems.

LING 501b / ENGL 501b / MDVL 510b, Beowulf and the Beowulf Complex Emily Thornbury
A close reading of Beowulf in Old English, within the modern and medieval critical landscapes. Prerequisite: a strong working knowledge of Old English (typically ENGL 500, or the equivalent).

LING 502a, Language Contact in the Ancient World Chelsea Sanker
What languages were people using in our earliest written records? How were they written? What were people talking about in these texts? This course examines the languages of the ancient Near East and other civilizations that they interacted with, from Greece to Egypt. Language contact is reflected both in ancient people's discussion of languages and use of translations, as well as in loanwords and other influences of languages on each other. Based on the written records, we also have information about other languages that were never written down, through names and other borrowed words. From the earliest tokens tracking trade commodities to epic poetry, these written records give us insights into the lives of people in the ancient world: the complaints of scribes in training, correspondences between kings, and dedications to gods.

LING 510a, Introduction to Linguistics Claire Bowern
The goals and methods of linguistics. Basic concepts in phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Techniques of linguistic analysis and construction of linguistic models. Trends in modern linguistics. The relations of linguistics to psychology, logic, and other disciplines.
LING 515a, Introductory Sanskrit I  Aleksandar Uskokov
An introduction to Sanskrit language and grammar. Focus on learning to read and translate basic Sanskrit sentences in the Indian Devanagari script. No prior background in Sanskrit assumed. Credit only on completion of LING 525/SKRT 520.

LING 525b, Introductory Sanskrit II  Aleksandar Uskokov
Continuation of LING 515/SKRT 510. Focus on the basics of Sanskrit grammar; readings from classical Sanskrit texts written in the Indian Devanagari script. Prerequisite: LING 515/SKRT 510.

LING 538a, Intermediate Sanskrit I  Aleksandar Uskokov
The first half of a two-term sequence aimed at helping students develop the skills necessary to read texts written in Sanskrit. Readings include selections from the Hitopadesa, Kathasaritsagara, Mahabharata, and Bhagavadgita. Prerequisite: LING 525 or equivalent.

LING 548b / SKRT 540b, Intermediate Sanskrit II  Aleksandar Uskokov
Continuation of LING 538, focusing on Sanskrit literature from the kavya genre. Readings include selections from the Jatakamala of Aryasura and the opening verses of Kalidasa's Kumaraśambhuva. Prerequisite: LING 538/SKRT 530 or equivalent.

LING 553a, Syntax I  Raffaella Zanuttti
An introduction to the syntax (sentence structure) of natural language. Introduction to generative syntactic theory and key theoretical concepts. Syntactic description and argumentation. Topics include phrase structure, transformations, and the role of the lexicon.

LING 564a, Principles of Language Teaching and Learning  Nelleke Van Deuren-Scholl
Introduction to the basic principles of second-language acquisition theory, focusing on current perspectives from applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. Topics include language teaching methodology, communicative and task-based approaches, learner variables, intercultural competence, and models of assessment.

LING 617a, Language and Mind  Maria Pinango
The course is an introduction to language structure and processing as a capacity of the human mind and brain. Its purpose is to bridge traditional domains in linguistics (phonetics, morphology, syntax) with cognition (developmental psychology, memory systems, inferential reasoning). The main topics covered are morphosyntax and lexical semantics, sentence composition and sentence processing, first- and second-language acquisition, acquisition under unusual circumstances, focal brain lesions, and language breakdown.

LING 634a, Quantitative Linguistics  Chelsea Sanker
This course introduces quantitative methods in linguistics, which are an increasingly integral part of linguistic research. The course provides students with the skills necessary to organize, analyze, and visualize linguistic data using R, and explains the concepts underlying these methods, which set a foundation that positions students to also identify and apply new quantitative methods, beyond the ones covered in this course, in their future projects. Course concepts are framed around existing linguistic research, to help students use these methods when designing research projects and critically evaluating quantitative methods in the academic literature. Assignments and in-class activities are a combination of hands-on practice with quantitative tools and discussion of analyses used in published academic work. Prerequisite: one entry-level linguistics course (e.g., phonetics, phonology, syntax, and psycholinguistics) or permission of the instructor.

LING 663a, Syntax I  Venetta Dayal
Introduction to truth-conditional compositional semantics. Set theory, first- and higher-order logic, and the lambda calculus as they relate to the study of natural language meaning. Some attention to analyzing the meanings of tense/aspect markers, adverbs, and modals.

LING 668b / CLSS 829b / HIST 507b / NELC 668b, Historical Sociolinguistics of the Ancient World  Kevin van Bladel
Social history and linguistic history can illuminate each other. This seminar confers the methods and models needed to write new and meaningful social history on the basis of linguistic phenomena known through traditional philology. Students learn to diagnose general historical social conditions on the basis of linguistic phenomena occurring in ancient texts. Prerequisite: working knowledge of at least one ancient language.

LING 680a, Morphology  Jim Wood
The theory of word structure within a formal grammar. Relation to other areas of grammar (syntax, phonology); basic units of word structure; types of morphology (inflection, derivation, compounding). Prerequisites: LING 632 and 653, or permission of the instructor.

LING 700a / PSYC 632a, The Cognitive Science of Sign Languages  Maria Pinango and Muye Zhang
Natural sign languages like American Sign Language have all of the structure and complexity of spoken languages. They are learned and processed like spoken languages, and they activate neural structures that maximally overlap with those activated by spoken languages. These findings have not only had important implications for the sociopolitical status of deaf people as a native, American minority community, but have also caused linguists and psychologists to reevaluate their most fundamental theories of language representation and processing in the mind and brain. The course introduces students to the analysis of sign languages at different levels of linguistic structure and related aspects of cognition in the visual modality. The primary goal is to encourage students to consider how natural sign languages can and must inform their linguistic theories (linguistics), models of language and cognition (psychology), and technological applications of language processing (computer science/artificial intelligence). We also consider the ways in which signing communities/deaf culture interact with the hearing world as marginalized minority groups and reflect upon access to language and information as a basic human right. Prerequisite: some background in linguistic structure, cognitive science, any signed language, or permission of the instructor is preferred.
LING 741a, Phonology at the Interfaces: Contrast Dispersion  Staff
This course explores how languages of the world structure contrasts in sound systems through a property known as contrast dispersion. We analyze contrast dispersion from a variety of different perspectives (for example, phonetic, phonological, diachronic, etc.). Students explore different ways that contrast dispersion has been defined over time, alternative theoretical approaches to contrast dispersion, and how scholars have formally modeled phenomena involving contrast dispersion. Prerequisite: LING 632 or equivalent.

LING 749b, Topics in Phonology: The Phonetics-Phonology Interface  Staff
The relationship between phonology (as the mental representation of speech) and phonetics (as the physical substance of speech). Universal and language-particular phonetics; phonetic knowledge as grammatical knowledge; phonetic detail in phonological representation and computation; unified vs. modular conceptions of the phonetics-phonology divide; how phonological systems are shaped by phonetic pressures; how phonetic patterning is shaped by phonological structure. Prerequisites: LING 620 and 635 or permission of the instructor.

LING 776b / PHIL 690b, Implicature and Pragmatic Theory  Laurence Horn
Theoretical and experimental approaches to conversational and conventional implicature. Pragmatic intrusion into what is said; constraints on truth-conditional content in neo-Gricean pragmatics and relevance theory. Arguments for and against the grammatical view of scalar implicature. Evidence from studies on the acquisition and processing of implicature and presupposition. Prerequisite: one course in semantics or pragmatics, or permission of the instructor.

LING 778b, The Syntax of Speech Events  Raffaella Zanuttini
How the notions of “speaker” and “hearer” of an utterance are incorporated into syntactic theory. A comparison of recent proposals to incorporate “speaker” and “hearer” into sentential syntax, generally in the left periphery of the clause. Topics include indexical shift, speaker-oriented discourse particles, vocatives, the category of “person,” object drop, pronoun-antecedent relations, evidentials, and root clause phenomena.

LING 796a, Semantic Investigations in an Unfamiliar Language  Veneta Dayal
This course introduces students to semantic fieldwork. It chooses a language that is likely not known to any student in the class and has no substantive semantic literature. Students are introduced to a phenomenon in the language on which there is some syntactic literature, either in that language or in one or more related languages. This provides a starting point for students to articulate questions to investigate that are primarily semantic in nature. Working with a native speaker consultant, students elicit data that answer these initial questions but very likely lead to further questions to investigate. To keep the elicitation focused, these investigations are restricted to topics related to the primary phenomenon discussed, while allowing some margin for individual interests. In addition to the syntactic and semantic literature on the chosen topic or topics, students also read material on fieldwork methodologies for linguistics generally as well as those specifically for semantics. Students work in small groups to fulfill part of the requirements. Prerequisites: LING 653 and LING 663 or permission of the instructor.