Linguistics

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M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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FIELDS OF STUDY

Fields include phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, neuro- and psycholinguistics, computational linguistics, historical linguistics, and descriptive study of a variety of languages.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE

Program Vision

Linguistics at Yale has a long and storied history in traditional approaches to the study of language. Today the department takes a distinctively integrative and interdisciplinary approach in investigating the systems of knowledge that comprise our linguistic competence. We are convinced that an understanding of the human language faculty will arise only through the mutually informing relationship between formally explicit theories and insights from wide-ranging descriptive and experimental work. Thus at Yale, theoretical inquiry grounded in introspection proceeds in partnership with historical and comparative studies, fieldwork, experimental investigations of normal and impaired language processing, cognitive neuroscience, laboratory phonetic analysis, and computational and mathematical modeling. Students in the Ph.D. program are exposed to these methodological approaches, while receiving firm grounding in the traditional domains of linguistics. Ph.D. students participate in research in phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and historical linguistics, and explore data from a wide variety of languages, both well studied and less well documented, with particular faculty expertise in the Romance, Australian, and Mayan languages.

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 must include a set of core courses, designed to expose students to core theoretical ideas, together with courses exposing students to a range of methodologies in linguistic research.

During their first six terms, students must complete a minimum of fourteen term courses at the graduate level, of which seven must be completed during the first two terms, and twelve during the first four terms. During the initial two years of course work, students must receive at least three grades of H (= Honors). Two grades of F, or three of P or F, during the initial two-year period constitute grounds for dismissal from the Ph.D. program.

Core courses The core requirement ensures that students achieve expertise at the level of the following courses: LING 612, Linguistic Change; LING 620, General Phonetics; LING 635, Phonological Theory; LING 654, Syntax II; LING 664, Semantics I; LING 680, Morphology.

The usual way to demonstrate this expertise will be to take all of these courses. Because several of these courses have prerequisites, students will typically need to take more basic courses in order to prepare themselves for the courses listed here. For example, LING 632, Introduction to Phonological Analysis, serves as a prerequisite for LING 635; and LING 653, Syntax I, is a prerequisite for LING 654; entering students usually take both of these prerequisite courses in the first term. However, students entering the Ph.D. program with sufficient background will be able to place out of antecedent courses. To facilitate placement, reading lists covering the material in the following basic courses will be provided, and students may request to take placement exams in areas in which their previous preparation
is such that they could proceed directly to more advanced course work: LING 512, Historical Linguistics; LING 620, General Phonetics; LING 632, Introduction to Phonological Analysis; LING 653, Syntax I; LING 665, Semantics I.

By August 1, entering students may send a request to the DGS for a placement exam in any of these five areas. The exams will be given during the week prior to the fall term. Passing an exam allows the student to place out of the corresponding course. Students placing out of courses are nonetheless expected to complete the same requirement of a minimum of fourteen term courses in the first three years.

**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 624, Formal Foundations of Linguistic Theories; LING 627, Language and Computation I; LING 630, Techniques in Neurolinguistics; LING 631, Neurolinguistics; LING 641, Field Methods.

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.

**Seminar courses** Starting in year three and continuing until the prospectus is approved, students are expected to enroll in one seminar course for credit each term. Students should use such seminars as opportunities both for exploring new research areas and, especially, for pushing current research interests in novel directions.

**Research**

The primary focus of a Ph.D. program is independent research. In the course of our Ph.D. program, students will learn to 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.

1. **Research adviser and first-year directed readings.** By the end of the first term of the program, students will need to find a department faculty member who is willing to serve as their research adviser. This choice should be made on the basis of compatibility of research interests and discussions between the student and faculty member. 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 are required to 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 set in stone: students who want to change their choice of topic or adviser for whatever reason may do so, so long as they are able to find a faculty member who is willing to serve as their adviser on a new topic. 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.

2. **Portfolio.** At the conclusion of the first year of the program, students must submit to the faculty a portfolio of two research papers, in two distinct subfields. These papers should demonstrate a student’s mastery of the material in these fields to the level covered in the core 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 course work. The faculty do not expect students to write papers expressly for the portfolio. Rather, the portfolio will typically consist of versions of term papers from classes taken during the first year in the program, which are then lightly revised on the basis of comments received from the course instructors. The deadline for the submission of these papers is June 15.

3. **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 the beginning of the third week of the fall term.

4. **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. Because the transition from student to scholar can be a difficult one, we have broken the process of writing the first QP into a number of smaller steps with specific deadlines for each (all during the second year of the program): (a) Students are required to make a presentation of their preliminary results in an appropriate venue (lab meeting, reading group, seminar, etc.) by no later than the end of the fall term. (b) 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 abstract 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. (c) Students must submit a first draft of their QP to their adviser and reader no later than February 1. (d) Students must make an oral presentation of their work. This oral presentation may take place in the department (typically at a Friday Lunch Talk). Alternatively, the oral presentation requirement may be satisfied via a presentation at a professional conference, provided at least one member of the department faculty is in attendance. (e) Once the QP has been orally
presented, students must submit the final version of the paper to their adviser and reader no later than three weeks from the date of presentation.

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 the beginning of the fall term of the third year. Students must follow the same steps and deadlines listed above for the second QP, this time during the third year.

5. **Prospectus.** No later than the beginning of the seventh term, students must choose a dissertation topic and find a faculty member who is willing to serve as dissertation adviser. By the end of the seventh term, 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 members of the Linguistics department. The prospectus document should be fifteen to twenty pages in length. After the document is submitted, the prospectus must be defended orally in front of the faculty. Upon successful completion of the prospectus defense, students advance to Ph.D. candidacy.

6. **Dissertation.** By the end of the eighth term, students must complete a chapter of the dissertation, together with a detailed outline of the dissertation and comprehensive bibliography. At this point (and at one-term intervals thereafter until the completion of the dissertation), the student will meet with the entire dissertation committee, to evaluate progress toward the dissertation. When this 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.

Students are expected to complete their dissertations by the end of the fifth 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.

**Feedback and Evaluation**

At the conclusion of each academic year, all Ph.D. students will receive a written evaluation of their performance in the program, highlighting their strengths and accomplishments, as well as mentioning areas for improvement. Because of the fundamental role played by research in the Ph.D. program, we expect the completion of the research requirements to take highest priority. It is particularly important that students make satisfactory progress toward the first QP and complete all work by the deadlines given above. Failure to do so may result in being asked to leave the program.

**Language Requirement**

Students are expected to exhibit some breadth in their knowledge of the languages of the world beyond those most commonly studied (including but not confined to Romance, Germanic, and Slavic languages) 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 class, or one or more classes 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 are required to serve as Teaching Fellows for a minimum of two terms, usually beginning in the first term of the third year. In addition, students must complete two additional terms of 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.
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