Linguistics

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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 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 665, 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**

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

**LING 510a, Introduction to Linguistics** Jason Shaw
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 512a, Historical Linguistics  Claire Bowern and Rikker Dockum
Introduction to language change and language history. Types of change that a language undergoes over time: sound change, analogy, syntactic and semantic change, borrowing. Techniques for recovering earlier linguistic stages: philology, internal reconstruction, the comparative method. The role of language contact in language change. Evidence from language in prehistory.

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-semester 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 538b / 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 Kamarasambhava. Prerequisite: LING 538 or equivalent.

LING 544a, Principles of Language Teaching and Learning  Petronella Van Deusen-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 600b, Experimentation in Linguistics  Maria Piñango and Jason Shaw
Principles and techniques of experimental design and research in linguistics. Linguistic theory as the basis for framing experimental questions. The development of theoretically informed hypotheses, notions of control and confounds, human subject research, statistical analysis, data reporting, and dissemination.

LING 611b, Grammatical Diversity in U.S. English  Raffaella Zanuttini
Language as a system of mental rules, governing the sound, form, and meaning system. The (impossible) distinction between language and dialect. The scientific study of standard and nonstandard varieties. Social attitudes toward prestige and other varieties; linguistic prejudice. Focus on morpho-syntactic variation in North American English: alternative passives (“The car needs washed”), personal datives (“I need me a new printer”), negative inversion (“Don’t nobody want to ride the bus”), “drama SO” (“I am SO not going to study tonight”).

LING 613b / AFST 613b, Hybrid Grammars: Dynamics of Language Contact, Language Acquisition, and Language Change  Enoch Aboh
Traditional approaches to language acquisition and change have typically assumed that children develop a mental grammar that replicates uniformly the linguistic knowledge of the current members of their monolingual speech communities. Therefore, language change must result from external factors: language contact involving a cohort of L2-learners. Likewise, multilingualism, thus language contact, is commonly assumed to hinder acquisition, and presupposed “intense” contact situations are regarded as propitious for creolization. This course proposes a shift of perspective, focusing on multiple-variety ecologies such as creole societies in which speakers-listeners can acquire, alternate between, and sometimes “mix” different languages, dialects, or registers. Two major questions are addressed: (1) How does acquisition proceed in such multiple-variety ecologies? (2) What does a theory of the multilingual mind tell us about acquisition of L1 and the emergence of grammars? The descriptive and theoretical framework adopted is that of hybrid grammars as developed in Aboh (2015). Prerequisite: familiarity with syntax and linguistic variation.

LING 617a, Language and Mind  Maria Piñango
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 619a, The Evolution of Language and Culture  Claire Bowern
Introduction to cultural and linguistic evolution. How diversity evolves; how innovations proceed through a community; who within a community drives change; how changes can be “undone” to reconstruct the past. Methods originally developed for studying evolutionary biology are applied to language and culture.

LING 620b, General Phonetics  Jason Shaw
Investigation of possible ways of describing the speech sounds of human languages. Tools to be developed: acoustics and physiology of speech; computer synthesis of speech; practical exercises in producing and transcribing sounds.

LING 624a, Mathematics of Language  Robert Frank
Study of formal systems that play an important role in the scientific study of language. Exploration of a range of mathematical structures and techniques; demonstrations of their application in theories of grammatical competence and performance including set theory, graphs
and discrete structures, algebras, formal language, and automata theory. Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of existing formal theories of linguistic knowledge.

LING 627a, Language and Computation I  Robert Frank
Design and analysis of computational models of language. Topics include finite state tools, computational morphology and phonology, grammar and parsing, lexical semantics, and the use of linguistic models in applied problems. Prerequisite: prior programming experience or permission of the instructor.

LING 631b, Neurolinguistics  Maria Piñango
The study of language as a cognitive neuroscience. The interaction between linguistic theory and neurological evidence from brain damage, degenerative diseases (e.g., Alzheimer's disease), mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia), neuroimaging, and neurophysiology. The connection of language as a neurocognitive system to other systems such as memory and music.

LING 632a, Introduction to Phonological Analysis  Natalie Weber
The structure of sound systems in particular languages. Phonemic and morphophonemic analysis, distinctive-feature theory, formulation of rules, and problems of rule interpretation. Emphasis on problem solving. Prerequisite: LING 510 or 620.

LING 633b, The Literate Brain and Mind  Kenneth Pugh
The neurobiological and cognitive foundations of reading and writing. Emerging research on gene-brain-behavior analyses of typically and atypically developing readers. The relationship between speech perception/production and individual differences in literacy learning; distributed brain circuits that support word reading, text comprehension, and second-language learning; the neurobiology of acquired and developmental reading and writing disorders.

LING 635b, Phonological Theory  Natalie Weber
Topics in the architecture of a theory of sound structure. Motivations for replacing a system of ordered rules with a system of ranked constraints. Optimality theory: universals, violailbility, constraint types, and their interactions. Interaction of phonology and morphology, as well as relationship of phonological theory to language acquisition and learnability. Opacity, lexical phonology, and serial versions of optimality theory. Prerequisite: LING 632 or permission of the instructor.

LING 641b, Field Methods  Claire Bowern
Principles of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics applied to the collection and interpretation of novel linguistic data. Data are collected and analyzed by the class as a group, working directly with a speaker of a relatively undocumented language.

LING 652a, Syntax I  Raffaella Zanuttini
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 654b, Syntax II  Hadas Kotek
Recent developments in syntactic theory: government and binding, principles and parameters, and minimalist frameworks. In-depth examination of the basic modules of grammar (lexicon, X-bar theory, theta-theory, case theory, movement theory). Comparison and critical evaluation of specific syntactic analyses. Prerequisite: LING 653.

LING 663a, Semantics I  Hadas Kotek
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 681b / AFST 681b, Comparative Syntax: A View from Kwa (Niger-Congo)  Enoch Aboh
This course adopts a microcomparative perspective by looking at closely related languages (i.e., Gbe and Kwa families of Niger-Congo) as well as a macrocomparative perspective that situates these languages in the larger context of typologically and genetically unrelated languages (e.g., Romance, Germanic). We set the stage by first looking at word formation, word classes, and the role of tones at the morphosyntactic level. Building on this, the first part of the course discusses topics such as Tense, Mood, Aspect (TMA) expressions, word order variation (e.g., VO vs. OV patterns), serial verb constructions, restructuring, and the notion of “light verb.” These topics allow us to establish a profile of the clause structure in these languages. With this knowledge at hand, the second part of the course addresses the question of information structure and the commonly assumed parallelism between the CP and DP domains. The descriptive framework adopted is the cartographic approach developed by Rizzi (1997), Cinque (1999), Aboh (2004), and much related work. Prerequisite: some background in syntax.

LING 725a, Topics in Phonology: Complexity  Jason Shaw
The seminar investigates complexity at different levels of phonological representation (features, segments, syllables) as well as the complexity of phonological patterns. Topics include approaches to formalizing complexity, including analytical tools from information theory, phonological processes that increase/decrease complexity, and the phonetic consequences of phonological complexity. Prerequisites: LING 620 and LING 635.

LING 744b, Topics in Phonology: Prosody, Syntax, Structure  Natalie Weber
Introduction to the analysis of prosodic structure, with a focus on the relation of prosodic structure to syntax. Survey of current theories of the correspondence between syntactic and prosodic structure. Particular emphasis on comparing theories and their predictions for language typology. Some empirical analysis of prosodic structure in individual languages. Prerequisites: LING 632 and LING 653, or permission of the instructor. LING 635 is recommended but not required.
LING 751b, Na-Dene languages  James Crippen
This course explores the Na-Dene (Dene-Eyak-Tlingit) family of indigenous languages of North America, which includes languages from Alaska (e.g., Tlingit), northern Canada (e.g., Dëne S#liné), western Canada (e.g., Dakelh), Oregon (e.g., Tolowa), California (e.g., Hupa), and the American southwest (e.g., Navajo). Topics addressed include historical and comparative research, phonology, morphology and syntax, and semantics, as well as the intersections between language and culture in the family. Students investigate and report on patterns and phenomena that are documented across multiple languages in the family, culminating in a final presentation and paper that summarize their research over the term. Prerequisites: LING 632 and LING 653, or permission of the instructor. LING 620 and LING 663 are suggested but not required.

LING 772a, Meaning, Concepts, and Words  Maria Piñango
The only way a finite brain can produce an unlimited number of novel thoughts is by storing a finite system. It is proposed that part of this system is a large collection of stored parts, which we call “concepts” and which are further combined and recombined via predetermined principles. In order to allow us to express our thoughts, our finite brain must also include a system of associating combinations of concepts with combinations of words and sentences. In this seminar we investigate proposals and empirical evidence from cognitive psychology, linguistics, and cognitive neuroscience, seeking to explain this connection between the ways we combine our concepts and the ways we combine our words and phrases.

LING 778a, 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 792b, From Morpho-syntactic Meaning: Definiteness, Indefiniteness, Genericity  Veneeta Dayal
This course explores how individual languages encode the notions of definiteness, indefiniteness, and genericity, and whether it is possible to predict such meanings when overt morpho-syntactic cues are absent. Languages with and without definite/indefinite articles provide critical test cases. Students read primary semantic literature on each of these three topics to gain a solid grounding in the theoretical issues. They also evaluate how empirical discoveries from different languages have shaped our understanding of the connection between morpho-syntax and semantics. The broader question considered here is the possibility of a restrictive theory of cross-linguistic variation in the interpretation of nominals. Prerequisite: LING 663 or permission of the instructor.