In any discussion of linguistics, in popular or academic contexts, the first question is always, what is linguistics, after all? This is remarkable. Language informs most of our mental and cultural activity, and linguistics is the just study of language.

The tradition of generative grammar posits (a) an idealized individual user of language, which is then seen as (b) a thoroughly rule-governed, (c) biological and universal system. This tradition has been dominant in the sociology of the field since the appearance of Chomsky's Syntactic Structures (1957).

But various programs have begun to move away from the reductionism of generative grammar and contextual approaches. Alternative approaches, which might be termed contextual, look at: (a) how individuals use language in the context of a community, from which it follows that (b) language is not just an abstract mental system; (c) language is rather a cultural habit, whose salient features are by no means universal.

Our program seeks to be inclusive; it presents both strains of linguistics, to ensure that students have the proper training to apply to graduate school, but leans more to a contextual approach. This bias to contextual linguistics fits with the tradition of linguistics at Columbia, from Franz Boas through Uriel Weinreich.

Linguistics, by virtue of dealing with language, naturally intersects with other academic disciplines which also touch on language from the perspective of the other discipline.

(a) Linguistics—at least contextual linguistics—shares with sociology and anthropology the axiom that language is communal, and therefore may be used (for example) to signal identity, to negotiate relations of power between members of a community, and the like. Linguistics does not reduce to sociology, however, in that linguistics investigates not only the communal side of language, but also the systemic and the cognitive properties of language.

(b) Cognitive psychology, in the attempt to understand the workings of the mind, often investigates language, which, after all, is the most accessible manifestation of the activity of the mind. Psychology, however, is virtually obligated to treat all languages as equivalent—after all, language is produced by the human brain, whose properties do not vary across individuals or cultures. In this way psychological investigations of language are less attuned to the variation and cultural incidence of language than linguistics.

(c) Some concerns of philosophy have been adopted by some practitioners of “formal semantics” in linguistics. Yet philosophy, like psychology, adopts an idealized view of language, whereby all languages and all modes of usage are equivalent; there is a tacit assumption that language is immutable. Linguistics—again, contextual linguistics, at least—when it investigates semantics finds the associative and subjective operations of metaphor (similarity) and metonymy (contiguity) as essential tools in modeling language meaning and change in meaning; the subdiscipline of cognitive linguistics focuses on these essentially tropic operations as the critical means whereby meaning is textured and changed over time; change in meaning over time is not relevant to psychology and philosophy. Philosophy and linguistics differ in their take on discourse. In philosophy, the Gricean approach to discourse, to take one example, posits an overarching and idealized “cooperative principle” against which behavior is evaluated. While Grice is in fact often invoked in linguistic discussions of discourse, linguistics is likely to be more empirical than the tradition of discourse in philosophy and pay attention, for example, to differences: to differences among functions of discourse (“genres” of speech), to differences in the roles of speaker, and to the differences between written and spontaneous oral use of language.

Study Abroad

Undergraduates have engaged in unique travel and research projects, including sign language in Nicaragua; language attitudes in Kyrgyzstan; colloquial Arabic in Cairo; summer internship at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Biology; and study abroad in Spain, England, India, Hungary, and Ireland.

Graduate Study

Columbia's linguists have distinguished themselves with awards and plans after graduation, such as Fulbright Fellowships to France, Georgia, and Turkey; and graduate study of linguistics or psychology at Harvard, Stanford, UCSD, Northwestern, New York University, and SUNY Buffalo. Linguistics is also a natural background for the law, and our students have entered such law schools as Georgetown and Columbia.

There is no graduate program in linguistics at Columbia. Students interested in pursuing graduate study in linguistics in New York should investigate CUNY Graduate Center, New York University, or Teachers College (applied linguistics).

The Columbia Linguistics Society

The Columbia Linguistics Society is an organization of undergraduates interested in linguistics which sponsors lectures and hosts informal social events. Information is available at http://columbialinguistics.wordpress.com/ or through Facebook.

Affiliated Faculty

May Ahmar (Arabic; MESAAS)
Akeel Bilgrami (Philosophy)
Aaron Fox (Music)
Haim Gaifman (Philosophy)
Boris Gasparov (Slavic Languages)
Tiina Haapakoski (Finnish, Germanic Languages)
Julia Hirschberg (Computer Science)
Ana Paula Huback (Latin American and Iberian Studies)
Rina Kreitman (Hebrew; MESAAS)
Meredith Landman (Slavic Languages)
Karen Lewis (Philosophy, Barnard)
Lening Liu (Chinese; East Asian Languages and Cultures)
David Lurie (Japanese; East Asian Languages and Cultures)
Kathleen McKeown (Computer Science)
John McWhorter (American Studies)
Yuan-Yuan Meng (Chinese; East Asian Languages and Cultures)
Michele Miozzo (Psychology)
Fumiko Nazikian (Japanese; East Asian Languages and Cultures)
Youssef Nouhi (Arabic; MESAAS)
Christopher Peacocke (Philosophy)
John Phan (East Asian Languages and Cultures)
Owen Rambow (Center for Computational Learning Systems)
Robert Remez (Psychology, Barnard)
Special Concentration in Linguistics
Linguistics at Columbia: Special Concentration

The special concentration in linguistics is not sufficient for graduation in and of itself. It must be taken in conjunction with a major or a full concentration in another discipline.

For the special concentration, students must take 18 points in the linguistics program as follows:

1. Three core courses in linguistics chosen from:
   - LING UN3101 Introduction to Linguistics
   - LING UN3102 Endangered Languages in the Global City: Lang, Culture, and Migration in Contemporary NYC
   - HNGR UN3343 Hungarian Descriptive Grammar
   - ANTH UN3906 Functional Linguistics and Language Typology
   - AMST UN3990 Senior Research Seminar
   - LING GU4108 Language History
   - LING GU4120 Language Documentation and Field Methods
   - LING GU4190 Discourse and Pragmatics
   - LING GU4202 Cognitive Linguistics
   - LING GU4206 Advanced Grammar and Grammars
   - LING GU4376 Phonetics and Phonology
   - LING GU4800 Language and Society
   - ENGL GU4901 History of the English Language
   - LING GU4903 Syntax

2. Two additional courses in either linguistics or in related fields chosen in consultation with the program director, in fields such as:
   - History or structure of individual languages
   - Chinese, Spanish, French, Russian, etc.
   - Anthropology
     - ANTH V3044 Symbolic Anthropology
     - ANTH W4042 Agent, Person, Subject, Self
     - ANTH G6125 Language, Culture, and Power
   - Computer Science
     - COMS W3261 Computer Science Theory
     - COMS W4705 Natural Language Processing
     - COMS W4706 Spoken Language Processing
     - COMS E6998 Topics in Computer Science
   - Comparative Literature & Society
     - CPLS GU4111 World Philology
   - French
     - FREN BC3011
   - Music
     - MUSI W4405 Music and Language
     - MSPS G4233 Language and Music (Seminar)
   - Philosophy

3. One language course at the intermediate level (third-semester), separate from the general language requirement.

In Fulfillment of the Language Requirement for Linguistics

The language taken in fulfillment of the linguistics requirement can be either an ancient or modern language, but should neither be the student’s native (or semi-native) language nor belong to one of the major groups of modern European languages (Germanic, Romance). In addition to the regularly taught courses listed under the Foreign Language Requirement, the following is a list of languages that have been offered at Columbia.

See the list of languages offered through the Language Resource Center and consult with the program director about other languages to determine if they are acceptable for the linguistics language requirement.

- Ancient Egyptian
- Anglo-Saxon
- Aramaic
- Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian
- Cantonese
- Chagatay
- Czech
- Finnish
- Georgian
- Hindi
- Hungarian
- Indonesian
- Irish
- Kannada
- Kazakh
- Korean
- Nahuatl
- Nepali
- Old Church Slavonic
- Quechua
- Persian
- Polish
- Pulaar
- Romanian
- Sumerian
- Swahili
- Syrian
- Tajik
- Tamil
- Telugu
- Ukrainian
- Uzbek
- Urdu
- Vietnamese
- Wolof
- Zulu
Linguistics

LING UN3101 Introduction to Linguistics. 3 points.
An introduction to the study of language from a scientific perspective. The course is divided into three units: language as a system (sounds, morphology, syntax, and semantics), language in context (in space, time, and community), and language of the individual (psycholinguistics, errors, aphasia, neurology of language, and acquisition). Workload: lecture, weekly homework, and final examination.

LING UN3102 Endangered Languages in the Global City: Lang, Culture, and Migration in Contemporary NYC. 3 points.
CC/GS/SEAS: Partial Fulfillment of Global Core Requirement

Of the world's estimated 7,000 languages — representing migrations and historical developments thousands of years old — the majority are oral, little-documented, and increasingly endangered under the onslaught of global languages like English. This course will take the unprecedented, paradoxical linguistic capital of New York City as a lens for examining how immigrants form communities in a new land, how those communities are integrated into the wider society, and how they grapple with linguistic and cultural loss. Interdisciplinary with an experiential learning component, the course will focus on texts, materials, encounters, and fieldwork with three of the city's newest and least-studied indigenous immigrant communities (indigenous Latin Americans, Himalayans, and Central Asians).

Indigeneity, though often invisible or perceived as marginal in global cities like New York, is in fact pervasive and fundamental. Cities now constitute a crucial site for understanding migration and cultural change, with language a vehicle for culture. Studying cultures only in situ (i.e. in their homelands) risks missing a crucial dimension. Students will be immersed in stateless, oral, immigrant cultures while also gaining a hands-on critical understanding of language endangerment and urban sociolinguistic research, first through field experiences and guest speakers (Endangered Language Alliance partners) and then by going out together into communities to work on projects in small teams.

The Endangered Language Alliance (ELA), where the instructor is Co-Director, was formed as a non-profit research institute in 2010 as a forum for researchers, community members, activists, artists, and other New Yorkers to come together to support indigenous and minority languages. ELA’s video recordings provide first-hand testimony of endangered languages in the global city — in indigenous languages with English translation — available in few other places. Those texts will be central to this course, supplemented by the new, first-ever, detailed language map of New York City being produced by ELA.

LING GU4108 Language History. 3 points.
Prerequisites: LING UN3101
Language, like all components of culture, is structured and conventional, yet can nevertheless change over time. This course examines how language changes, firstly as a self-contained system that changes organically and autonomously, and secondly as contextualized habits that change in time, in space, and in communities. Workload: readings & discussion, weekly problems, and final examination.

LING GU4120 Language Documentation and Field Methods. 3 points.
Prerequisites: LING UN3101
In light of the predicted loss of up to 90% of the world languages by the end of this century, it has become urgent that linguists take a more active role in documenting and conserving endangered languages. In this course, we will learn the essential skills and technology of language documentation through work with speakers of an endangered language.
LING GU4170 Language and Symbol: Semiotics of Speech, Literature, & Culture. 3 points.
Not offered during 2019-20 academic year.

Prerequisites: LING UN3101 or a course on linguistic semantics, literary theory, or linguistic anthropology.

Reading and discussion of scholarly literature on various aspects of the meaning, structure, and functioning of signs in language, art, and society. All reading for the course is drawn from original scholarly literature, some of it of a specialized nature. At some points (for instance, while discussing dimensions of the linguistic signs, or parameters of structural poetics), theoretical reading will be supplemented by brief practical assignments.

LING GU4171 Languages of Africa. 3 points.
Not offered during 2019-20 academic year.

The African continent is home not to simply a collection of similar "African dialects," but to at least 1000 distinct languages that belong to five language families, none of them any more closely related than English and its relatives are to Japanese. This includes the Semitic languages that emerged in the Middle East and are now most commonly associated with Arabic and Hebrew, the famous "click" languages of Southern Africa whose origins are still shrouded by mystery, and in the case of Malagasy on Madagascar, the Austronesian family of Southeast Asia and Oceania - the language traces to speakers who travelled over the ocean from Borneo to Africa. This course will examine languages in all of these families, with a focus on how they demonstrate a wide array of linguistic processes and how they interact with social history, anthropology, and geography.

LING GU4172 The Structure of Cambodian. 3 points.
Like every other language, Cambodian is totally unique in some respects (these are of interest only to the language learner), and a representative human language in others (these are of interest to all students of language). Thus, for example, like every written language, Cambodian will exhibit diglossia: the grammar and the vocabulary of the written language will differ from that of the spoken language. It is also a member of a language family, known as Austroasiatic, whose members are spoken from NE India through Malaysia, Myanmar, and Indochina. In addition, Cambodian is a structural representative of a given type of language spoken throughout mainland Southeast Asia. That is, in many respects, the structure of Cambodian is similar to those of Lao, Thai, Vietnamese, as well as Hmong. In the "Far West" of SE Asia, are spoken other languages, among them Burmese, Mon, and Karen, which are still similar, but less so. All of these languages are isolating, monosyllabic languages. Of the languages just listed, only Vietnamese and Mon are genetically related to Cambodian. Finally, in its orthography and lexicon, Cambodian has borrowed so extensively from Indic languages, that all literate speakers have a considerable background in practical etymology, and recognize borrowings from, say, Pali, as English speakers generally do not recognize borrowings from Norman French or Latin or Greek. Since the Indic languages belong to Indo-European, some unexpected words in Cambodian (e.g., niam, smaeu) will turn out to have English cognates (like name, same).

Your goal in this course is not to acquire a speaking knowledge of Khmer. (For that you would need a pedagogical grammar, a native-speaker instructor, and hours and hours of practice in the lab and in the classroom.) It is rather to understand from a linguist's point of view what it is that makes this language a typical language of this part of the world. We will be working through a reference grammar of the language together. You are each also going to 'adopt' another mainland SE Asian language for purposes of comparison, to experience for yourself what it means for a language to be a member of a linguistic alliance or Sprachbund. You may select your own 'pet' language, and your assignment will then be to 'master' this language in the same way that you have 'mastered' Khmer.

LING GU4190 Discourse and Pragmatics. 3 points.
Prerequisites: LING UN3101

How discourse works; how language is used: oral vs. written modes of language; the structure of discourse; speech acts and speech genres; the expression of power; authenticity; and solidarity in discourse, dialogicity, pragmatics, and mimesis.

Spring 2019: LING GU4190
Course Number  Section/Call Number  Times/Location  Instructor  Points  Enrollment
LING 4190  001/10663  M W 6:10pm - 7:25pm  John Wright  3  14/25 507 Hamilton Hall

LING GU4202 Cognitive Linguistics. 3 points.
Prerequisites: LING UN3101 previously or concurrently.

Reading and discussion of scholarly literature on the cognitive approach to language, including: usage-oriented approaches to language, frame semantics, construction grammar, theories of conceptual metaphor and mental spaces; alongside of experimental research on language acquisition, language memory, prototypical and analogous thinking, and the role of visual imagery in language processing.
LING GU4376 Phonetics and Phonology. 3 points.
Not offered during 2019-20 academic year.

Prerequisites: LING UN3101
An investigation of the sounds of human language, from the perspective of phonetics (articulation and acoustics, including computer-aided acoustic analysis) and phonology (the distribution and function of sounds in individual languages).

Spring 2019: LING GU4376
Course Number Section/Call Number Times/Location Instructor Points Enrollment
LING 4376 001/76588 T Th 10:10am - 11:25am 303 Hamilton Hall Meredith 3 28/35

LING GU4444 In Search of Language: From Rousseau to Derrida. 0-3 points.
Not offered during 2019-20 academic year.

The course addresses fundamental ideas concerning the nature of linguistic meaning and communication as they evolved in modern times, from the Enlightenment to the contemporary critique of the modernist linguistic paradigm. Beginning with the polemic between Herder and Rousseau, the course then proceeds to Romantic philosophy of language (in particular, the role of Romantic philosophy in the emergence of historical linguistics and linguistic typology); Saussure, his structuralist interpreters and his critics; generative grammar as a philosophical concept; the notion of linguistic performativity and its philosophical implications; Bakhtin’s heteroglossia; and the impact of the poststructuralist semiotic revolution (Barthes, Derrida) on the study of language.

LING GU4800 Language and Society. 3 points.
How language structure and usage varies according to societal factors such as social history and socioeconomic factors, illustrated with study modules on language contact, language standardization and literacy, quantitative sociolinguistic theory, language allegiance, language, and power.

LING GU4903 Syntax. 3 points.
Prerequisites: LING UN3101
Syntax - the combination of words - has been at the center of the Chomskyan revolution in Linguistics. This is a technical course which examines modern formal theories of syntax, focusing on later versions of generative syntax (Government and Binding) with secondary attention to alternative models (HPSG, Categorial Grammar).

Fall 2019: LING GU4903
Course Number Section/Call Number Times/Location Instructor Points Enrollment
LING 4903 001/53925 T Th 10:10am - 11:25am 709 Hamilton Hall Meredith 3 17/18

LING GU4206 Advanced Grammar and Grammars. 3 points.
Prerequisites: LING UN3101
An investigation of the possible types of grammatical phenomena (argument structure, tense/aspect/mood, relative clauses, classifiers, and deixis). This typological approach is enriched by the reading of actual grammars of languages from Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Americas.

Of Related Interest
Anthropology (Barnard)
ANTH UN1009 Introduction to Language and Culture
ANTH V3044 Symbolic Anthropology