

Interested in This Major?

Current Students: Contact Assistant Professor Anne Pycha at pycha@uwm.edu

Not a UWM Student yet? Call our Admissions Counselor at 414-229-7711 or email let-sci@uwm.edu

web: uwm.edu/linguistics



What is Linguistics?

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. Linguists seek to understand the nature of human language by examining the formal properties of grammar and syntax, and through understanding of the process by which humans learn a first or a second language.

Given the central importance of language to both cognition and culture, linguistics intersects with a diverse array of other fields, including psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, anthropology, and computer science.

Sub-specialties within linguistics are devoted to various aspects of language. In the area of grammatical theory, linguists study the nature of sentence structure (syntax), sound systems (phonology), sentence meaning (semantics), word formation (morphology), sound production and perception (phonetics), and utterance context (pragmatics). Linguists study the processes by which speakers learn the various aspects of grammar, both as children (first language acquisition) and as adults (second language acquisition). Linguists examine the structural and social factors that underlie language use (sociolinguistics), changes to language over time (historical linguistics), and multilingualism.

The study of linguistics uses an interdisciplinary set of methodologies, including psychological experimentation (psycholinguistics), neurological imaging (neurolinguistics), and computational modeling and machine learning (computational linguistics).

Jobs for Linguists

Linguists can be found in many different professions and industries where an understanding of language structure and usage is valuable. Theoretical linguistics

is focused on data analysis and argumentation, making it an especially valuable preparation for careers that emphasize these skills, such as law. Common career tracks for undergraduate linguistics majors include the following, some of which may require specialized training or a graduate degree.

- Law
- Technical writing
- Journalism
- Search engine optimization
- Software development for speech recognition
- Teaching linguistics, speech, English, or foreign languages
- Teaching English as a second language either within the U.S. or abroad
- Translation and interpretation
- Product naming
- Lexicography (working with dictionaries)
- Literacy programming
- Standardized test development or management
- U.S. intelligence or foreign service
- Corporate training
- Language training for actors

Foreign Language Requirement

Being bilingual or multilingual is not a requirement to be a linguist. However, being proficient in a language in addition to English is very helpful for understanding the commonalities and variation of languages. Students with this skill set have a broader sense of how language fits into other cultures and have more career options in translation, teaching, and interpreting.

Linguistics majors must fulfill the standard foreign-language degree requirements of the College: four semesters of a single foreign language or three semesters of one language and two semesters of another language. It is possible to meet all or parts of this requirement by taking enough foreign language in high school.

Majors in Linguistics

The Linguistics Department offers undergraduate majors with tracks in either General Linguistics or Applied Linguistics. The general major is broader and provides preparation for further graduate study or entry into a professional position. The applied major is more focused on using linguistics principles and concepts for finding solutions to language-related challenges or problems that occur in everyday life. Applied linguistics topics include second language acquisition, principles of teaching English or other languages, literacy and computer-assisted language.

Either option within the major requires a minimum of 30 credits. Students must complete at least 15 credits in 300-level or higher classes at UWM. A minimum 2.5 GPA is required in all credits in the major. Students are encouraged to combine the linguistics major with a related field (possibly another major) and to focus their electives in areas closely aligned with their professional goals.

General Linguistics Track – Required Courses

Course #	Course Title
Linguistics 350	Intro to Linguistics
Linguistics 450	Phonetics
Linguistics 460	Introduction to Phonology
Linguistics 464	Introduction to Syntax
Three of the following:	
Linguistics 415	First Language Acquisition
Linguistics 420	Intro to Second Language Acquisition
Linguistics 430	Language and Society
Linguistics 466	Semantics
Linguistics 468	Language in its Various Forms
Linguistics 470	Historical/Comparative Linguistics
Linguistics 474	Language Typology
Linguistics 560	Advanced Phonology
Linguistics 564	Advanced Syntax
9 elective credits chosen from a list of approved classes	

Applied Linguistics Track - Required Courses

Course #	Course Title
Linguistics 350	Intro to Linguistics
Linguistics 420	Intro to Second Language Acquisition
Linguistics 450	Phonetics
Linguistics 460	Introduction to Phonology
Linguistics 464	Introduction to Syntax

One of the following:	
Linguistics 430	Language and Society
Anthro/Linguistics 570	Issues in Bilingualism
At least two of the following:	
Linguistics 410	Linguistics & Grammar in ESL Education
Linguistics 415	First Language Acquisition
Linguistics 432	Urban Dialects
Linguistics 440	Psycholinguistics
Linguistics 468	Language in its Various Forms
Linguistics 565	Intro to Adult/University Level TESOL
Linguistics 567	Materials for ESL Instruction
6 elective credits chosen from a list of approved classes	

Minors in Linguistics

The Linguistics Department offers undergraduate minors in either General Linguistics or Applied Linguistics, each requiring a minimum of 18 credits.

Related Certificate

The Adult/University-Level TESOL Undergraduate Certificate Program is designed to meet the needs of students who wish to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) to adults or university-level students abroad. The program is open to undergraduates with at least junior standing, to post-baccalaureate special students, and to those who do not plan to pursue a college or university degree (non-degree students) but who have a strong interest in this subject. Graduate students or post-baccalaureate non-degree students should pursue instead the “Adult/University-Level TESOL Graduate Certificate Program.” Training in the graduate certificate program is more rigorous, and some credits earned can be transferred to the Linguistics Department master’s program. See the TESOL information sheet for more information.

“My linguistics major gave me a better understanding of how to assist speakers of other languages. Working in education is a great option for linguistics majors.”

-Laty Johnson, HR Compliance Manager
Oakland Unified School District
B.A. Linguistics, 1999

Other sample alumni jobs:

- Systems Analyst, Frodtert and the Medical College of WI
- IT Manager, Centene Corporation
- Scientist, Los Alamos National Lab
- Medical Interpreter, Aurora Healthcare
- Archivist, Kohler Co.
- Investigator, U.S. Dept. of Labor

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This sample four-year plan shows just one possible pathway to earning a degree with this major in four years. This plan **does not** replace the advice of your advisor, and students are cautioned to meet regularly with their advisor to create a personalized plan that matches their particular circumstances. This plan also follows the degree requirements for students who began their college education in Fall of 2013 or later. If you started college prior to Fall of 2013, your degree requirements may be different.

Degree Requirements (brief summary):

1. English Proficiency and UWM Oral and Written Communication (OWC) GER - English 102 (fulfills Part A) and one OWC-Part B course.
2. Math Proficiency, UWM Quantitative Literacy (QL) GER, and Formal Reasoning – two courses can satisfy all three requirements. Some courses have prerequisites, however, so a student may end up taking more than two total classes depending on his/her placement test scores. Students will usually take Math through College Algebra AND three credits in either a 200-level or above math course, Philosophy 211, or an approved Letters & Science statistics course.
3. Foreign Language – 4 semesters of a single Foreign Language (or 3 semesters of one language and 2 semesters of another language) (May be satisfied through 4 years of a single Foreign Language in high school.)
4. L&S Humanities (HU) – 12 credits
5. L&S Social Sciences (SS) – 12 credits
6. L&S Natural Science (NS) – 12 credits including one lab
7. L&S International (Int'l) – 9 credits usually accomplished in conjunction with Humanities and/or Social Science courses
8. UWM Arts GER – 3 credits
9. UWM Cultural Diversity GER (CD) – 3 credits usually accomplished in conjunction with a Humanities or Social Science course
10. 120 credits including 90 credits in L&S and with 36 of the 90 credits in L&S upper-level (numbered above 300) courses
11. Complete the Linguistics major requirements in either the General Linguistics option or the Applied Linguistics option
 - General Linguistics option
 - » 30 credits with at least 15 numbered 300 or above completed at UWM
 - » Linguis 350, 450, 460, and 464
 - » Three of Linguis 415, 420, 430, 466, 468, 470, 474, 560, 565
 - » 9 credits elective courses from an approved list
 - Applied Linguistics option
 - » 30 credits with at least 15 numbered 300 or above completed at UWM
 - » Linguis 350, 420, 450, 460, 464

- » Linguis 430 or 570
- » Two courses from Linguis 410, 415, 432, 440, 468, 565, 567
- » 6 credits elective courses from an approved list

Sample Four Year Plans:

There are hundreds of courses that satisfy various requirements and courses can count towards more than one requirement. For example, Africol 215 counts towards the major and as a social science course. (This sample assumes no high school Foreign Language was taken and that the student placed into college-level math and English.) This sample plan follows the general linguistics option, as an example.

	Semester 1	Semester 2
Year 1	English 101	English 102 (OWC-A)
	Math 103 or 105 (QL-A)	L&S Humanities
	1st semester Foreign Language	2nd semester Foreign Language
	Linguis 100 (HU) (CD)	L&S Natural Science
	L&S Natural Science	Arts GER
Year 2	OWC-B course	L&S Humanities, not Linguis
	3rd semester Foreign Language (Int'l)	4th semester Foreign Language (Int'l)
	L&S Social Science, not Linguis	L&S Social Science, not Linguis
	Linguis 350 (SS)	Linguistics upper-level requirement
	L&S Natural Science with lab	MthStat 215 or other QL-B course
Year 3	L&S Humanities/Int'l	L&S Natural Science
	Linguis 464	Linguis 430 (SS)
	Linguis 450	Linguis 460
	L&S upper-level elective	L&S upper-level elective
	Elective	Elective
Year 4	Linguis upper-level requirement	Linguis upper-level requirement
	Linguis upper-level elective	Linguis upper-level elective
	L&S upper-level elective	L&S upper-level elective
	Elective	Elective
	Elective	Elective