Linguistics, Ph.D.

Department of Linguistics graduate programs emphasize theory and research. Students interested in non-university careers also may take courses in applied linguistics and other fields in connection with doctoral work.

Iowa’s linguistics department has particular strengths in phonology, syntax, and second language acquisition (SLA).

The phonology curriculum emphasizes current theoretical perspectives, including optimality theory, and the collection, description, and interpretation of novel phonological and phonetic data. Courses feature extensive work in data analysis and problem solving, focusing on construction and evaluation of phonological theories, particularly in light of new empirical data.

The syntax curriculum includes the dual emphases of empirical and theoretical perspectives. It offers a variety of foundational courses that build analytic and argumentation skills, as well as specialized course work on current issues in syntactic theory. The courses consist of intensive work in problem solving. They combine discovery and description of new linguistic data with exploration of the implications of such facts in testing and constructing syntactic theories.

The curriculum in second language acquisition includes courses that provide an overview and analysis of current SLA research conducted within the generative framework, with emphasis on explaining the linguistic competence of second language learners in terms of universal grammar (UG), the innate language acquisition device. Work focuses on experimental research investigating the influence of the first language, theories of UG access, and related topics.

Requirements

The Doctor of Philosophy in linguistics requires a minimum of 72 s.h. of graduate credit, or 73 s.h. for graduates of the M.A. nontesis program. The highly selective program provides students with a strong foundation in theoretical linguistics and helps them develop the skills they will need to explore the close relationship between linguistics and related disciplines.

The Ph.D. core includes the following course work (total of 18 s.h.).

One upper-level syntax course numbered 
LING:7010 or above
One upper-level phonology course numbered 
LING:7020 or above
Two or more seminars

An approved specialty area of 18 s.h. also is required, and students must achieve proficiency in a world language, as specified by department regulations.

To pass the comprehensive examination for the Ph.D., a student must gain approval for two papers of publishable quality. One must be in phonology or syntax. The other should be in an area of the student’s choosing and must be distinct from the area of the first paper.

An oral defense of the dissertation and three years in residence at the University of Iowa are required. In addition, all candidates are required to gain supervised experience in teaching and research.

Admission

Applicants to the graduate program in linguistics must complete an application form, submit Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test scores, and have three letters of recommendation sent to the Department of Linguistics. Students whose first language is not English must submit Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores. Applications for admission should be submitted as early as possible for the following academic year.

Applicants must meet the admission requirements of the Graduate College; see the Manual of Rules and Regulations of the Graduate College.

Financial Support

Applications should be received by February 1 for the following academic year in order to have priority in consideration for financial aid. Applications received after February 1 are considered for remaining aid. Early submission of an application is strongly encouraged.

Applications for awards are considered only for students whose application for admission is complete.

Career Advancement

Linguistics majors have found work teaching English as a second language overseas. Unique teaching opportunities worth exploring include those with the Peace Corps and Teach For America.

A number of companies, such as Microsoft, Xerox, Apple, Hewlett-Packard, and other high-tech firms, regularly hire employees with linguistics degrees. Opportunities also exist for government work, for example, as a special agent linguist for the FBI.

The Pomerantz Career Center offers multiple resources to help students find internships and jobs.