

Linguistics

Director, Division of World Languages, Literatures and Cultures

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Undergraduate major: linguistics (BA)

Undergraduate minor: linguistics

Graduate degrees: MA in linguistics; PhD in linguistics

Faculty: <https://linguistics.uiowa.edu/people/faculty>

Website: <https://linguistics.uiowa.edu/>

Linguistics is the scientific study of human languages, which are highly complex systems. Areas of study include word structure (morphology), speech sounds (phonetics) and their patterns of combination and contrast (phonology), sentence structure (syntax), and meaning relations (semantics).

Linguists study well-known and familiar languages, such as English, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese. They also study less well-known languages and even those languages about which little has been discovered. While human languages are different from one another in many ways, there are broad similarities among them, supporting the idea that the capacity for language is part of human cognitive functions.

The description of formal patterns of human language has a number of applications. Linguistics is connected to psychology and to speech and hearing, in studying how children learn language, how speakers process and interpret language, and how injuries and disorders affect both production and perception of speech. Linguistics also is linked with anthropology and other social sciences in studying how language use relates to culture, region, class, and gender. Linguists collaborate with computer scientists to construct computational representations of syntax and semantics for processing natural languages.

Linguistics has important ties with instruction in world languages and in English as a second language (ESL). Studies of how languages are learned are based in part on analysis of the languages in question. They also are grounded strongly in theories of second language acquisition, which in turn are related to theories of how linguistic knowledge is represented in the mind.

People with linguistic training teach ESL and help clinicians retrain people with linguistic disabilities. Some help design school programs for underserved groups or intelligence and achievement tests. Linguists also work in occupations related to law, the computer industry, and world languages.

High scores on verbal, analytic, and quantitative aptitude tests are indicators of success in linguistics. Although few aspects of the field deal with numbers, students must be able to reason logically and explicitly and deal with formulas and abstract symbols.

The Department of Linguistics is one of the academic units in the Division of World Languages, Literatures and Cultures.

Related Certificate

Cognitive Science of Language

The Graduate College offers the graduate Certificate in Cognitive Science of Language. Designed to complement doctoral study, the certificate program ensures that students have training in interdisciplinary approaches to the study of language along with strong theoretical grounding in their PhD discipline. See the Certificate in Cognitive Science of Language in the catalog for more information.