

Linguistics Newsletter

Fall 2023

Studying linguistics changes the way we think about the world and opens our minds to so many things we are incorrectly taught by society, like the idea that certain dialects of English are “grammatically incorrect”, or that there’s only one sign language and sign language is just miming. As linguists we have the deeper knowledge and understanding to actually explain to people why these things are wrong and how these fallacies harm others.

- Cassandra Prokopowicz
Graduating Class of 2023 Student Speaker

Inside this Issue

Letter from Chair	1
Faculty Updates	2
Graduate Student Updates	3
Undergraduate Student Updates	4
Upcoming Events	4
Alumni Profiles	5
Get Involved	7

Letter from Chair

Dear friends,

I'm delighted to share with you a new edition of our Linguistics alumni newsletter, which is reaching nearly 2,300 Linguistics alumni. It took a while for us to get it going again. We are fortunate to have a new Communications Coordinator, McKenzie Rehfus, who is working with our staff on new editions of this newsletter.

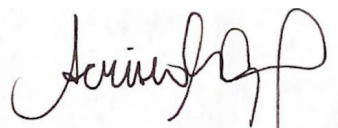
A lot has happened since our last newsletter. You will see news about the five new faculty who have joined the department, significantly expanding the instructional opportunities for our students, in areas including sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, phonology, syntax and bilingualism. We are now teaching all our regular intro level courses once or twice a year, to more than 2000 students. Our expanded instructional faculty team is teaching one third more students than two years ago. Among various curriculum developments, we have three new large classes being offered every year, Ling 106 Start Talking, Ling 114 World of Words and Ling 115 Language in a Multicultural World, and our faculty added many new courses, on language and computational linguistics language and reading, research methods, and speech and language disorders.

Eleven PhD graduates and two new undergraduate classes, more than a 100 graduates, joined you as fellow alumni. You will see some of their news in the next pages. This year we broadened the recognition of our graduating students' success, by introducing three new awards for graduating students, for service to the department and to fellow students, for excelling in the speech pathology path, and for overall excellence in the major, adding to the honors thesis award which was the only graduating senior award we had for a long time. We have reached about 100 majors again, and we now have close to 60 minors in linguistics.

Our faculty and their research teams have received several external grants, on topics such as cross-linguistic computational neuroscience, event description in sign language and gesture, and on the identification of digital expression of Black Grief. These initiatives are fostering new developments and collaborations within linguistics and with other disciplines.

I hope you enjoy the news in the next pages about our faculty, students, and interviews with fellow alumni, which to me is one of the most exciting features of this newsletter. Please also take the opportunity to [share your own news](#), comments, or suggestions for future issues at linguistics@umich.edu.

Cordially,



Acrisio Pires
Chair, Department of Linguistics

Leadership Roles

Ezra Keshet, Associate Professor of Linguistics and affiliate faculty in Philosophy, is the new Associate Chair, besides continuing as Director of Undergraduate Studies of the Department of Linguistics this Fall.

Jelena Krivokapić, Associate Professor of Linguistics is the new Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Linguistics.

Faculty Updates

Welcome to the Department!



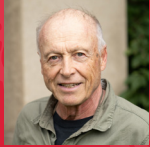
Jessi Grieser
Associate Professor



Tajudeen Mamadou
Visiting Research
Assistant Professor



Andrew McInnerney
Lecturer I



Eric Rosen
Lecturer I



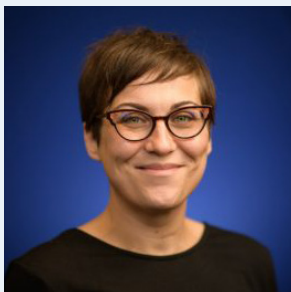
Yourdanis Sedarous
Lecturer I



Department Participation at Linguistic Society of America 2023 Annual Meeting

The 97th Annual Meeting of the Linguistics Society of America was held in person in Denver, CO from January 5-8. **Jessi Grieser** delivered a luncheon keynote, "Breaking NORMS: What Cities Still Have to Teach Us in the 21st Century" at the concurrent American Dialect Society conference. **Savithry Namboodiripad** facilitated a workshop for the LSA Session on hiring, tenure, and promotion. **Andries Coetzee** participated in a plenary panel discussion "Language: A journal of and for the linguistic community".

[READ MORE](#)



Natasha Abner Becomes Associate Professor and Receives Teaching Award

Assistant Professor **Natasha Abner** was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure. Dr. Abner joined the U-M Linguistics Department in 2017. As a corollary to Natasha Abner's promotion to Associate Professor, she received the 2023 Class of 1923 Memorial Teaching Award for outstanding undergraduate teaching.

[READ MORE](#)

New Research Grants

Our diverse research groups and labs continue to be a focus of innovative and collaborative research among faculty and students. Our faculty have been awarded many external grants that are likely to advance the field of linguistics and benefit different communities. These grants will investigate topics such as:

Natasha Abner : Event Description in Sign Language and Gesture

Jonathan Brennan : Cross-Linguistic Computational Neuroscience & Characterizing the Recovery of Spectral, Temporal, and Phonemic Speech Information from Visual Cues

Jessi Grieser : What's in a grammar? A Micro-comparative Study of Negation in American Englishes & Automatic Identification of Online Expressions of Black Grief.

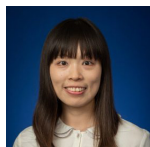
Jeffrey Heath : Documentation of Bozo Languages of Mali

Jelena Krivokapić : Cortical Dynamics Underlying Interactive Language Use

Graduate Student Updates

Tzu-Yun Tung & Felicia Bisnath Awarded Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship

The [Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship](#) is one of the most prestigious awards granted by the Rackham Graduate School. The fellowship supports outstanding doctoral candidates working on dissertations that are unusually creative, ambitious and impactful.



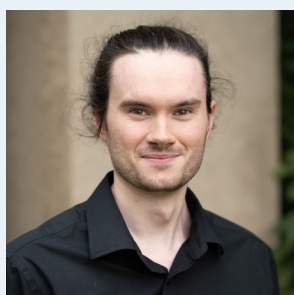
Tzu-Yun Tung
2022-2023

[READ MORE](#)



Felicia Bisnath
2023-2024

[READ MORE](#)



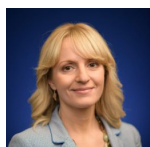
Andrew McInerney Distinguished Dissertation Award

Andrew's PhD dissertation *The Argument/Adjunct Distinction and the Structure of Propositional Phrases* received the Rackham [ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Award](#), which recognizes highly accomplished graduate students who have produced exceptional dissertations of outstanding scholarly quality in any field of study. This is a prestigious honor awarded to only 10 PhD graduates in all of Rackham's doctoral programs each year.

[READ MORE](#)

Sophie Eakins & Danuta Allen Receive Deborah Keller-Cohen Award

The Deborah Keller-Cohen Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching is an early-career teaching award for Linguistics graduate student instructors. The Department of Linguistics created the award in 2018, in honor of professor Deborah Keller-Cohen, now emerita.



Danuta Allen
2022-2023

[READ MORE](#)



Sophie Eakins
2023-2024

[READ MORE](#)

Recent PhD graduates

[Danielle Burgess](#) | [Tamarae Hildebrandt](#) | [Yourdanis Sedarous](#) | [Kelly Wright](#) | [Andrew McInerney](#)

Welcome New Graduate Students!



2022

Pictured Left to Right:
Isaias Ceballos III
Olawale Akingbade
Junyuan Zhao
Aya Halabi
Kendall Lowe



2023

Pictured Left to Right:
Daniel Morales
Martin Mössmer
James Baybas

Undergraduate Student Updates



Congratulations, Class of 2023!

Graduating Linguistics seniors and family members joined department faculty and staff at the Michigan Union on April 28th to celebrate the highlights and accomplishments of the Class of 2023.

[READ MORE](#)

Undergraduates representing U-M Linguistics around the country

Thea Kendall-Green, Dawn Lau, and Montana Thommes presented a poster titled "Maze Correlates of N400 Responses in English Argument Structure Processing" at the [Human Sentence Processing Conference](#) in Pittsburgh on March 9, 2023.

Jacky He presented his work on "Understanding Public Opinion on COVID-19: Sentiment and Topic Analysis of Online Discourse" at the [Midwest Cognitive Science Conference](#), Grand Rapids, and at the [UC Davis Symposium on Language Research](#), Davis, California, both in May of 2023.

Recognizing Seniors

In addition to our standing Matt Alexander Award for outstanding honors thesis, we have also introduced several new awards that broadly celebrate and recognize the accomplishments and contributions of our graduating class.

The Matt Alexander Award: Grace Brown ('22) & Dawn Lau ('23)

Outstanding Pre-Speech and Hearing Senior Award: Jaimie Krueger ('23)

Service to the Linguistics Department Award: Sarah Jia Qi Ong ('23)

Outstanding Senior Award: Madison Tessler ('23)

Linguistics Events

Are you going to be in Ann Arbor this Fall?

Stop by the office and say hello, explore what is new on campus!

Linguistics Department

440 Lorch Hall, 611 Tappan Ave
Office Hours - 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Monday - Friday

2023 Colloquium Schedule

[September 15](#) - Steve Abney

[September 29](#) - Myles Durkee

[November 3](#) - Jonathan Harrington

[November 17](#) - Mike Putnam

[December 1](#) - Graduate Student Colloquium

Join us in person or on Zoom!

Don't worry if you miss one, check out our YouTube page and watch later.

[COLLOQUIUM YOUTUBE](#)

Alumni Profiles



Annemarie Toebosh

PhD, Class of 2003

Advisors: Sam Epstein and Christina Tortora

Student activities/involvement

I worked as a Graduate Student Instructor in Linguistics and German, in the ELI Writing Lab, and I was a fellow in the Sweetland Writing Center.

Since graduating from U-M:

Working first as a linguist at UM-Flint, I moved back to Ann Arbor to head up the Dutch Studies program in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, a decolonial language program that teaches Dutch, a colonial language on colonized land, as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Our program stands in the service of colonial repair for current and former Dutch-colonized lands and peoples, including in the US. I am an affiliate faculty member in Judaic Studies at U-M, and I teach one of our campus' largest Holocaust courses, *Anne Frank in Context*, a course that examines the Diary of Anne Frank and its position in Dutch memory culture in the context of Dutch colonial genocides in Indonesia, Africa, and the Americas.

Career and other highlights that you're most passionate about or proud of:

My writing on Dutch colonialism has been published in Dutch, English and Indonesian, including in *The Conversation* and *Truthout*.

How has your U-M linguistics degree influenced your career path?

My work in Chomskyan Linguistics prepared me for the academic activism central to my pedagogy and curricula. I am currently developing a course on the languages created through, and endangered by, Dutch colonialism, including Afrikaans, Bahasa Indonesia, Papiamentu, Sranan Tongo, the Lenape Languages, and Taíno (extinct).



Anshul Puli

Minor, Class of 2020

Student activities/involvement

I worked with the Anishinaabe Native American Tribe in Central Michigan to digitize their language resources through the Anishinaabe Language Digitization Project.

Since graduating from U-M:

Currently, I am a third year medical student at Harvard Medical School, with a focus in community health and health equity. My professional interests broadly include mental health, indigenous peoples' health, and community health.

Career and other highlights that you're most passionate about or proud of:

As a member of the City Year Americorps I helped teach 5th graders at an elementary school in Boston during the 2020-2021 academic year.

How has your U-M linguistics degree influenced your career path?

My classes and linguistics-inspired projects have crucially shaped my approach to healthcare. LING 370 (Language and Discrimination) was my favorite undergraduate class, helping me frame issues on equity through discussions on how language sets up power differentials. The professors from my linguistics classes have also been super supportive and motivating with any career interests or project ideas I've brought up. Finally, my project work with the Anishinaabe have been a central part to my motivation to currently work on health equity issues with indigenous tribes in Massachusetts, where I have been collaborating with a tribe to conduct a health needs assessment.



Rita Simpson-Vlatch

PhD, Class of 1997

Advisors: Leslie Milroy and Rosina Lippi-Green

Since graduating from U-M:

Currently, I am the ESL Program Manager at Jewish Family Services of Washtenaw County. My professional interests include adult ESL education and teacher training, with a particular focus on literacy and refugee communities.

Career and other highlights that you're most passionate about or proud of:

I am the Founding Project Manager for MICASE (Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English) at the U-M English Language Institute and the Founder of the American Association for Corpus Linguistics. I published numerous articles related to MICASE and corpus linguistics between 1998 to 2010. Notably, one of my articles (Simpson-Vlach and Ellis, 2010) has over 1,000 citations to date. Recently, the MICASE corpora were licensed through U-M to Grammarly and DuLingo for purposes of AI training.

How has your U-M linguistics degree influenced your career path?

My U-M Linguistics degree has given me my lifelong identity as a bona fide linguist, regardless of my professional affiliation. Though I did not pursue a traditional academic career, my years as a researcher gave me opportunities I could have never imagined in a field I didn't even know existed until I was hired as a postdoc at the ELI. In recent years, I've returned to the field of ESL teaching, which is what first inspired me to pursue graduate studies in linguistics over 30 years ago. I continue to draw on my linguistics training in my teaching, curriculum development, and teacher supervision (as well as my love of learning new languages).



Paul Roberge

PhD, Class of 1980

Since graduating from U-M:

Upon completion of my doctoral degree at Michigan, I was appointed Assistant Professor at Princeton University (1980-85), where I taught in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures and the Linguistics Program. In 1985 I accepted an Associate Professorship at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where I have been ever since, save for a visiting appointment back at Princeton in 1988. Currently I am Professor of Germanic Languages and joint Professor of Linguistics at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Career and other highlights that you're most passionate about or proud of:

I served as Chair of the Department of Linguistics at UNC-Chapel from 2011 to 2018. I have also held an appointment at Stellenbosch University (South Africa) as Extraordinary Professor of General Linguistics (2007-2016).

How has your U-M linguistics degree influenced your career path?

As Roger Lass pointed out in his book *The Shape of English* (1987), there was a time when, say, German, Spanish, Russian language studies were more or less disciplines on their own, like other "philologies." But things have changed – and indeed were changing even when I was a grad student at U-M. Earning my MA degree in Linguistics (1975) in addition to my PhD in Germanic Languages and Literatures (1980) allowed me to obtain a solid, comprehensive grounding in general linguistics as well as specialist knowledge of the linguistics of German and other Germanic languages. It has served me well in my current and previous situations.

In Memoriam

[READ MORE](#)

Dr. **Wilfredo Valentín-Márquez** (Feb. 7, 1962 – May 7, 2023) was known to many in the University of Michigan community. He received a PhD from the past joint Romance Languages – Linguistics PhD program, Wilfredo was a long-time faculty member of the English & World Languages Department at Millersville University in Pennsylvania, where he was a professor of Spanish. He adored and was adored by his nuclear and extended family, and always spoke glowingly of his foster son, daughter-in-law, and young grandson.

The Department of Linguistics at the University of Michigan is one of the few departments in the United States that captures the inherent breadth of the discipline by exploring the cognitive, interactional, cultural, and developmental aspects of language. Faculty and students explore language structure, history, knowledge, behavior, and use. Faculty research aims to integrate these diverse approaches to language in ways that engender new modes of linguistics inquiry and new research domains.

Get Involved

Gift & Donation Opportunities

EXPLORE GIVING

Share Your News With Us

SUBMIT NEWS TODAY

Connect with Current Undergraduates

LSA CONNECT

Have an Internship or Job Opportunity?

EMAIL US

Join Departmental Colloquia

ADD TO CALENDAR

University of Michigan
611 Tappan Ave, Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Phone: 734.764.0353
Fax: 734.936.3406
Email: linguistics@umich.edu

