

FALL 2024

LINGUISTICS

NEWSLETTER





U-M Linguistics at the 2024 Graduation Celebration



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Letter from the Chair

Dear alumni friends,

As we embark on a new academic year, I'm excited to share updates from our department in this Fall edition of our alumni newsletter. I start by highlighting that the newsletter aims at bringing you news about what is going on in the Linguistics community at the University of Michigan, but it truly is for and also about you, our esteemed alumni. In that sense, I would like to emphasize that we very much welcome receiving more news from each of you who wish to be featured in a future edition.

On to some of the news inside, we are thrilled to welcome a new faculty member, Assistant Professor Huteng Dai, who specializes in phonology and computational linguistics, and postdoctoral fellow Brad Mackay, a sociolinguist. We are also delighted to welcome seven bright new PhD students, each bringing unique perspectives and passion to our Linguistics community.

See also news about the retirement of Professor Bill Baxter (Asian Languages and Culture; Linguistics), a leading historical linguist of Old Chinese in North America, who gained wide recognition for his reconstruction of historical Chinese phonology.

We are delighted to share news of a wonderful gift to the department from one of our distinguished alumni, Dr. Eric Breck (B.S. 1998), and his wife, Ms. Emily Breck, which has established the Excellence

in Linguistics Undergraduate Education Fund in the Linguistics Department. They were inspired to make this gift in honor of Associate Professor Emeritus John Lawler, who passed away last year.

In the newsletter, we share the invitation to an event to honor the memory of Professor Lawler, through a Celebration of Life event that will be held in Ann Arbor by his family.

Regrettably, we received the sad news about the passing of another retired faculty member, Professor Emeritus Vitaly Shevoroshkin (Slavic Languages & Literatures; Linguistics) in December 2023. Professor Shevoroshkin made significant contributions to the study of world languages, particularly by exploring the relationship between the Indo-European languages and other language groups.

Among the events that took place in the department since the Winter term, thanks to the work of several of our faculty, students and staff, we had the pleasure to welcome two international linguistics conferences to campus, the 37th Annual Human Sentence Processing Conference in May, and the Formal and Experimental Advances in Sign Language Theory conference (FEAST) in August. Both conferences brought many renowned linguists to campus to present their latest research.

You will find below information about our upcoming department colloquia. Keep in mind that our colloquia are now usually broadcast online and recordings are later made available on our YouTube colloquium channel, so you have the option to follow our colloquium series online.

To close, I reiterate the invitation for you to share news about you through the link on the last page of the newsletter. Thank you for your continued interest and engagement with the Linguistics department.

Warm regards,

Acrisio Pires
Chair, Department of Linguistics



Ojibwe Language Research and Pedagogy Workshop

An Ojibwe Language Research and Pedagogy Workshop, funded by the Social Science and Humanities Collaboratory, brought together an interdisciplinary group of scholars, including assistant professor [Cherry Meyer](#) (Linguistics Department and Department of American Culture). Renowned Ojibwe language expert Dr. Mary Ann Naokwegijig-Corbiere led discussions on translation, language pedagogy, and Indigenous methodologies. Attendees, comprising Ojibwe language instructors, faculty, and students, are dedicated to expanding the Ojibwe language's presence on campus and statewide. The workshop emphasized the importance of preserving Indigenous languages and enhancing cultural education.

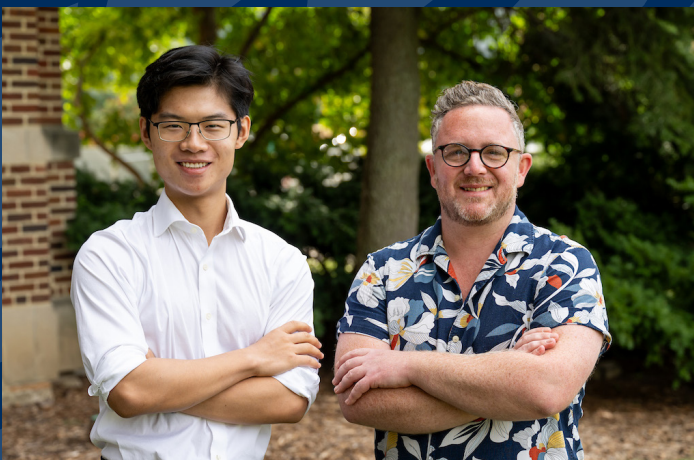
[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Bridging Language and Music at U-M's Bell Tower Carillon

Associate Professor of Linguistics Jessi Grieser exemplifies the interdisciplinary spirit of the University of Michigan by blending her academic focus on sociophonetics with her performances on the Charles Baird Carillon in Burton Memorial Tower. This iconic instrument, with its 53 bronze bells, can be heard over a significant radius, sending musical notes floating over the university grounds and beyond. Grieser's fascination with the physics of music began as an undergraduate, revealing surprising connections between musical acoustics and the vocal tract's resonant frequencies. This fusion of linguistics and music enriches the academic and cultural life at U-M.

[READ THE FULL STORY](#)

Welcome to the Department!



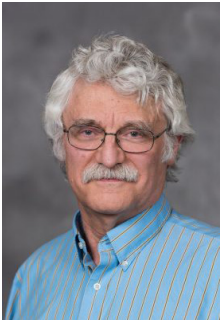
Huteng Dai
Assistant Professor
(Left)

Brad Mackay
Postdoctoral Research Fellow
(Right)



John M. Swales *Graduate Writing Clinic Dedication*

The University of Michigan's English Language Institute (ELI) has recently recognized the career contributions of Linguistics Professor Emeritus [John M. Swales](#) by renaming their Graduate Writing Clinic in his honor. This tribute acknowledges Professor Swales long-standing service as the Director of ELI (1985 to 2001) and his extensive mentorship to graduate students and faculty both within the Institute and beyond. The English Language Institute's [John M. Swales Graduate Writing Clinic](#) is a free service, open to all graduate students, visiting scholars, staff, and faculty members across all U-M colleges and schools.



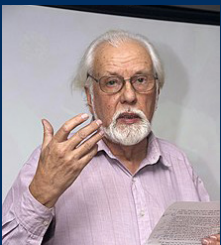
William Baxter's Retirement

Professor [William \(Bill\) H. Baxter](#), now Professor Emeritus of Linguistics and Professor Emeritus of Chinese Language and Literature, retired in May 2024, concluding a distinguished career in the active faculty at the University of Michigan.

Professor Baxter joined the University of Michigan faculty in 1983. He specialized in historical Chinese linguistics, making groundbreaking contributions with his books, *A Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology* (1992) and *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction* (2013). The latter reaffirmed his position as a leading historical linguist of Old Chinese in North America, receiving the prestigious *Leonard Bloomfield Book Award* (2016) from the Linguistic Society of America. Professor Baxter has been a leading figure in the reconstruction of historical Chinese phonology and in determining the path from older forms of Chinese to their modern descendants. He also played a key role in integrating Chinese historical linguistics into the curricula of the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures and the Department of Linguistics. Congratulations to professor Baxter on his retirement!

[READ MORE](#)

Passing of Vitalij Shevoroshkin *U-M Slavic Languages & Literatures and Linguistics*



The department announces with regret that Vitalij Shevoroshkin, professor emeritus of Linguistics and Slavic languages and literatures, passed away in Switzerland in December 2023. Professor Shevoroshkin, originally from the former Soviet Union, earned his B.A. from Moscow State University and his Dr. of Philological Sciences degree from the USSR Academy of Sciences. He joined the University of Michigan as professor in 1979 after teaching at the University of Maryland and Yale University, and retired in 2009.

Professor Shevoroshkin made significant contributions to the study of world languages, particularly by exploring the relationship between the Indo-European languages and other language groups in books such as *The Lydian Language and Sound-chains in the World's Languages*. He was a prolific writer on the reconstruction of ancient languages and received many awards for his work on ancient languages, including a Faculty Recognition Award.

Within the University, Professor Shevoroshkin played a key role in teaching ancient languages and Russian linguistics, offering courses on Indo-European languages, Anatolian languages and historical linguistics.

In Memoriam: John Michael Lawler



Celebration of Life Event

John Lawler, Associate Professor Emeritus of Linguistics and former Associate Professor in the Residential College, passed away in 2023. John Lawler's celebration of life, an event in his honor, is being organized by his family. Friends and colleagues are invited to celebrate the life of John Lawler in Ann Arbor on:

Sunday, September 15.

4:00 PM (EDT)

Jewel Heart Buddhist Center

1129 Oak Valley Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48108

John's family and his partner Kate Birr hope many of you can join in person. There will be a live Zoom connection, with an opportunity to participate, for those who can't be there. If you're planning to attend, RSVP to Sally Haines in Ann Arbor (slawler@umich.edu) for the Zoom link or to attend in person.

In Ann Arbor, the celebration will start at 4 PM with greetings and light refreshments. At 4:30, with Zoom attendees connected, there will be a brief slideshow and then guests will take turns sharing memories and

stories and maybe a joke or two. The floor will be open to anyone who'd like to speak, including folks on Zoom.

John passed away last November in Bellingham, Washington, in Kate's care. He did not want a memorial, but he did want friends and family to have a party, which is what is being planned for September 15.

In Memoriam

John Lawler is survived by his partner Kate Birr; children Alexandra (Sasha) Lawler and Ian Lawler; grandchildren Hunter and Alexander Lawler; five siblings; and his former wife, Sally Haines.

An Eagle Scout and National Merit Scholar, John earned his PhD (1973) in linguistics from the University of Michigan, where he taught for 37 years. He joined the faculty at the University of Michigan as an assistant professor in 1973 and was promoted to associate professor in 1977, retiring in 2009.

John Lawler was a much-admired and inspiring instructor of undergraduates in the Department of Linguistics and the Residential College, where he encouraged students to think carefully about the power of words. He was interested principally in undergraduate education and with making a permanent place for linguistics in primary and secondary schools. He taught a variety of highly popular courses on metaphor, English grammar, and general linguistics. He received a Fulbright fellowship to Malaysia and LSA's Excellence in Education award in 1991, 1992, and 1993. He was very involved in steering the growth of computing within Linguistics and the College during the 1980s and early 1990s, and achieved national recognition in information technology through his contributions in this area to the Linguistic Society of America.

Generous Gift from Eric L. Breck and Emily Breck to the Linguistics Department

We are delighted to share news of a wonderful gift to the department from one of our distinguished alumni, Dr. Eric L. Breck, and his wife, Ms. Emily Breck. Dr. Eric Breck received a B.S. in Linguistics from the department in 1998. They were inspired to make this gift in honor of Dr. John Lawler, Associate Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, who passed away last year.

Their gift has supported the creation of the Excellence in Linguistics Undergraduate Education Fund in the Linguistics Department, with an endowment that is expected to reach \$100,000 in five years. The fund will support undergraduate student scholarships, internships/ experiential educational opportunities, the development of interdisciplinary curriculum, and other priority areas of Linguistics undergraduate education.

Dr. Eric Breck states:

“When I arrived at U of Michigan as a freshman in 1994, after all the tumult of college applications and choice, I felt strongly that I had found the right place for me. I first met John Lawler at an event to help undergrads find a major, and he encouraged me to take his introduction to linguistics class. I took his advice and I absolutely adored the course. I went on to major in linguistics (and mathematics), to take another course with John later in the Residential College, and to do [research](#) and attend a conference with him as a senior. He also helped me find my first job after college, as an Artificial Intelligence Engineer doing natural language processing research at MITRE in the Boston suburbs. After a few years there I went on to do a PhD in computer science focusing on NLP, and now, decades later, I’m working as a software engineer in AI and machine learning. So John really helped set me on the path that I’m still exploring today. I’m forever grateful to him, to the linguistics department, and to Michigan for the opportunity to meet fascinating and brilliant people and engage with ideas that still shape my thinking all these years later. Go Blue!”

How to Donate

- **Online:** [Excellence in Linguistics Undergraduate Education Fund](#)
- **By Mail:** Send checks to UM Gift and Records
(3003 S. State St., Suite 8000, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1288) with fund number 703086
- **By Phone:** Call UM Giving at (1-888-518-7888)

DONATE ONLINE TODAY



Demet Kayabaşı Awarded Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship

Linguistics PhD candidate Demet Kayabaşı has been awarded a highly regarded Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship for 2024-2025. This award recognizes her innovative dissertation research comparing how the encoding of noun and verb categories emerges across the gesture-language continuum.

LEARN MORE

186th Meeting of the Acoustical Society of America

PhD students Emma Portugal, Kendall Lowe, and Csilla Tatar showcased their groundbreaking research in sound and linguistics at the 186th Meeting of the Acoustical Society of America in Ottawa. Their studies explore diverse topics such as the interplay of intonation and co-speech gestures in African American English, dialect features in Armenian speech, and the phonetic nuances of sarcasm. Learn more about their fascinating findings and contributions to the field.

CONTINUE READING

Successful Dissertations

LAURETTA CHENG

JEONGHWA CHO

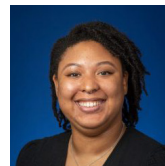
FELICIA BISNATH



Sophia Eakins Receives Outstanding GSI Award

We're thrilled to announce that U-M Linguistics doctoral student Sophia Eakins has received the prestigious 2024 Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor Award. This honor is given to only a select few out of the thousands of GSIs at UM, acknowledging their exceptional dedication and teaching excellence.

SEE MORE

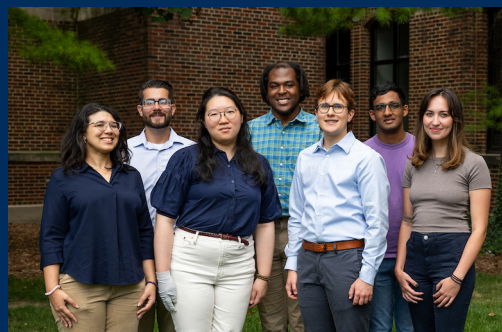


Sovoya Davis Receives Deborah Keller Cohen Award

Congratulations to PhD student Sovoya Davis for winning the Deborah Keller-Cohen Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching! This prestigious award, named after Professor Emerita Keller-Cohen, celebrates outstanding early-career teaching.

LEARN MORE

Welcome Fall '24 Grad Cohort



Back Row (Left to Right)
Simon Campos, George Stain,
& Sid Bhushan

Front Row (Left to Right)
Nour Kayali, Xueyang Huang,
Elliot Stork & Sophie Faircloth

Congratulations 2024 Graduates

The Department of Linguistics honored the outstanding achievements of the 2024 graduating class on May 3rd. The event featured inspiring speeches from distinguished students Thea Kendall-Green, Pristina Koon, and Brennan Yaghmour, who shared their unique journeys and reflections on the power of language and community. Additionally, several awards were presented to recognize academic excellence and service, highlighting the diverse accomplishments of our graduates.

“There’s something extraordinarily special about our community in that we’re all—at some level—curious about the actual thing that lets humans connect: language.”

-Pristina Koon 2024 Graduation Speaker

Awards



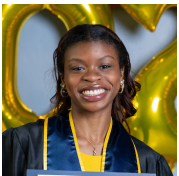
The Matt Alexander Award for the best honors thesis

Brennan Yaghmour, “Perceptual Effects of Emphasis Spread on Non-Arabic Speakers.”



Service to the Linguistics Department Award

Oona Lee Woodbury



Outstanding Pre-Speech and Hearing Senior Award

Madison Mitchell



Outstanding Overall Senior in Linguistics Award

Drue Daley

[FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE 2024 GRADUATES](#)

Celebrating Inclusion: Natasha Abner & Camp Looking Glass

Associate Professor and department alumna [Natasha Abner](#) shared a heartfelt recap showcasing the 2024 summer session at Camp Looking Glass. This non-profit organization in the Mississippi Delta offers free year-round recreational and summer camp experiences for people with disabilities, all run by dedicated volunteers. Professor Abner, involved since 2006, highlights the camp's mission to celebrate inclusivity and foster enduring friendships. The video, available on the camp's [YouTube](#) channel, captures the joy and connection among campers and invites viewers to learn more and get involved through Camp Looking Glass's [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page. Celebrate diversity and discover how you can support this incredible community.

READ THE FULL STORY

In Memoriam: Nancy Currier Dorian

The University of Michigan mourns the passing of esteemed linguist and alumna Nancy Currier Dorian, who died peacefully on April 24, 2024. A scholar of language preservation, Nancy earned her Master's (1961) and Doctorate (1965) in Linguistics from U-M and devoted over four decades to teaching and research, particularly on the East Sutherland dialect of Scottish Gaelic. Her influential work, including the seminal book "Language Death: The Lifecycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect," garnered numerous accolades and left an indelible mark on the field of endangered languages. Beyond academia, Nancy was an advocate for social justice, a creative writer, and a beloved community member. Her legacy will continue to inspire future linguists and scholars worldwide.

READ MORE

Diane Larsen-Freeman: A Legacy of Linguistic & Cognitive Excellence

[Diane Larsen-Freeman](#), a distinguished alumna and former faculty member of Linguistics at U-M, has been celebrated for her significant contributions to linguistics and language education throughout her esteemed career. Language Teaching Research Quarterly (LTRQ) recently dedicated a special issue to her lifetime of achievements in the field of language teaching and learning. Additionally, her Interdisciplinary approach to research led to her election as a Fellow of the Cognitive Science Society. These honors highlight Larsen-Freeman's influence on the understanding of the cognitive aspects of language learning and use. Through these recognitions, Diane Larsen-Freeman's work resonates deeply within the academic community.

FIND OUT MORE

Celebrating Jennifer Nguyen

The College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) at the University of Michigan proudly honors its exceptional staff through the annual Staff Achievement Awards Program. [Jennifer Nguyen](#), a 2006 Linguistics PhD alumna and Academic Services Manager for the Linguistics Department, received the 2024 Kay Beattie Outstanding Individual Award in the Social Sciences division. Recognized for her unwavering commitment, exceptional contributions, and inspirational influence on colleagues and students, Jennifer's achievement underscores her remarkable work ethics and problem-solving skills. Congratulations to Jen Nguyen for this much deserved award!

FULL ARTICLE

PAST EVENTS

Human Sentence Processing Conference

In May the University of Michigan's Departments of Linguistics, Psychology, and the Weinberg Institute for Cognitive Science hosted the prestigious [Human Sentence Processing](#) (HSP) 2024 conference, highlighted by groundbreaking presentations and an NSF-funded session on "Socially Situated Language Processing." The event also included significant contributions from U-M faculty, students, and alumni, and featured the NSF-funded Janet Dean Fodor Memorial Workshop to honor her contributions to psycholinguistics.

LEARN MORE

FEAST Conference

The Linguistics Department at the University of Michigan was proud to host the 11th [Formal and Experimental Advances in Sign Language Theory conference \(FEAST\)](#) conference from August 6th to 8th, 2024, in Ann Arbor, MI. The conference brings together researchers dedicated to formal approaches to sign language grammar, particularly within the generative tradition, as well as those focused on experimental methodologies and their intersection.

The 2024 conference, organized by Associate Professor [Natasha Abner](#) with significant contributions from several graduate students, notably [Demet Kayabasi](#), also featured a special panel, "Crip Linguistics: A Panel in Honor of Dr. Jonathan Henner." The conference keynote presentations were delivered by Lorna Quandt from Gallaudet University and Mirko Santoro from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.

UPCOMING EVENTS

2024 Colloquium Schedule

Join us on Zoom or In-Person on campus in East Hall 4448. All colloquiums run 4:00PM - 5:30PM.

Sept. 20 th	Rada Mihalcea, <i>University of Michigan</i>
Oct. 11 th	Jennifer Cole, <i>Northwestern University</i>
Oct. 25 th	Shota Momma, <i>University of Massachusetts</i>
Nov. 15 th	Meredith Tamminga, <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>
Dec. 6 th	Linguistics Graduate Student Colloquia

Watch our Colloquia today!

COLLOQUIUM YOUTUBE

Join us virtually for all our upcoming colloquia

ATTEND ON ZOOM

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.

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Join Departmental Colloquia

[ADD TO CALENDAR](#)

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