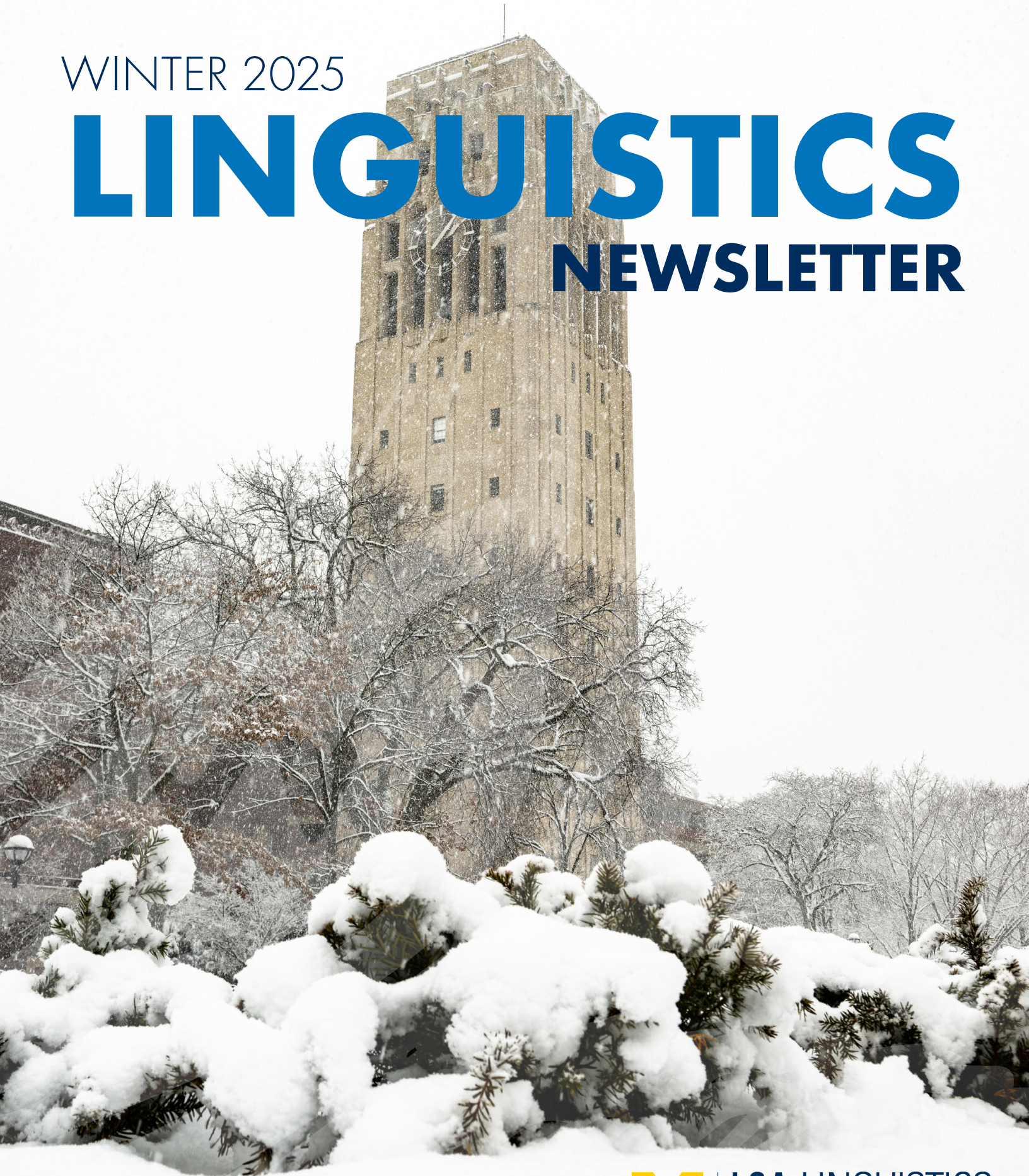


WINTER 2025

LINGUISTICS

NEWSLETTER





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Letter from the Chair

I hope you and those around you are doing well as you receive this issue of the U-M Linguistics alumni newsletter. In the next pages you will find many exciting news items about what the U-M Linguistics community has been doing, but this newsletter also comes to you during a particularly challenging period for liberal arts and higher education, and for many people that it serves, in particular thousands of current students. Many ongoing actions and policy changes by the US federal government are likely to substantially impact the important missions of universities in educating a new generation, advancing knowledge and offering successful solutions to problems faced by individuals and communities in all domains of life. For instance, the ongoing reductions or interruptions in federal funding for research and to support higher education are already limiting the resources that are directed to these missions.

Yet, it is during these times that the value of a liberal arts education becomes most relevant. A liberal arts education, in linguistics and in other fields, plays a crucial role in the development of analytical and critical thinking that citizens need to successfully deal with all the complex issues of contemporary life. A linguistics education can help students develop the skills to engage with and better understand interpersonal, cultural, historical and political matters, preparing them to be lifelong learners who can more easily adapt to constantly evolving paths in their personal and professional lives.

In this scenario, we encourage you to share how your studies in linguistics, as part of a liberal arts education, have made a meaningful impact on your life and career. Your stories are powerful testimonials to the value of higher education. You certainly already talk about these experiences with family and friends. We encourage you to share your testimonies on social media as well — your voice can inspire and inform others, especially the younger generations who are being exposed to a lot of information that often aims at undermining the crucial role that education plays in life.

We also invite **you to use the link in the final page of this newsletter** to share with us your comments about how your linguistics education has affected your life. Tell us if you would be open to having your statements quoted in our webpage, social media or a future alumni newsletter. We are grateful for your engagement.

On to the news digest that follows, besides our faculty and student news, check the upcoming conferences and colloquia that will happen in the department by this Fall, and the new series of profiles of your fellow alumni. Don't hesitate to contact us if you also would like to be featured in a future issue.

Thank you for your continuous support and engagement with UM Linguistics, which helps champion the significance of linguistics and liberal arts education in today's world.

Best wishes,

Acrisio Pires
Chair, Department of Linguistics

FACULTY UPDATES



Ezra Keshet Receives Award for Undergraduate Teaching

Professor [Ezra Keshet](#) has received the 2024 LSA Individual Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education!

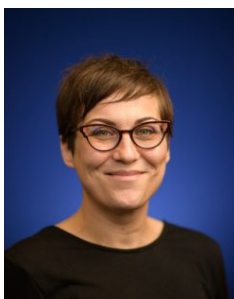
LEARN MORE



Andries Coetzee Awarded Collegiate Professorship of Linguistics

We're excited to share that Linguistics Professor [Andries Coetzee](#) has been honored with a Collegiate Professorship by LSA.

FIND OUT MORE



Natasha Abner on the Pandemic's Impact on Disability Awareness

In an interview, Associate Professor [Natasha Abner](#) discussed the evolution of friendships five years into the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the challenges of maintaining connections in an ableist society. She emphasized the need for intentional relationships with disabled people to foster meaningful connections and drive broader social change. Her insights are part of a discussion on social resilience and accessibility in a post-pandemic world.

CHECK OUT THE INTERVIEW

Queen et al. Publish in Language

Professor [Robin Queen](#) and a team of U-M students and alumni published in the December 2024 centennial issue of *Language*. Their study explores how familiarity, identity, and modeling influence the production of singular *they*.

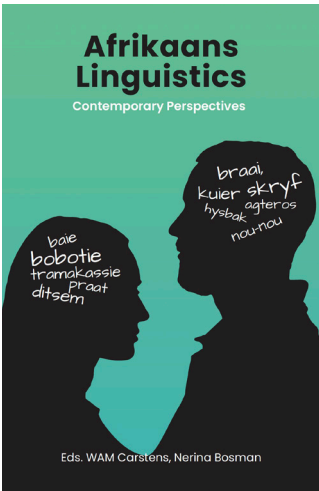
"Getting to know them: Effects of familiarity, identity, and modeling on the production of singular specific *they*"

READ ARTICLE

Jessi Grieser Publishes in Language

Associate Professor [Jessi Grieser](#) published "The Greatest Puzzle" in *Language* as part of its centennial celebration. The article revisits Labov's seminal work on copula variability and its influence in the field.

READ ARTICLE



Patagonian Afrikaans: Lecture and Publication by Andries Coetzee

Professor [Andries Coetzee](#) recently delivered a guest lecture at Lanzhou University titled "[Patagonian Afrikaans: Place, Identity, and History](#)," where he emphasized collaborative research efforts with Professors Nick Henriksen and Lorenzo García-Amaya on the Patagonian Afrikaans community. In addition to his lecture, Coetzee and his colleagues have contributed a chapter focused on this community, further expanding on the cultural and historical significance of Patagonian Afrikaans.

CONTINUE READING



Jessi Grieser quoted in an ABC Good Morning America

Associate Professor [Jessi Grieser](#) was quoted in an ABC Good Morning America article titled "From 'sus' to 'rizz,' parents of Gen Alpha kids try to keep up with slang." The article examines how parents are struggling to keep up with the evolving slang used by their Gen Alpha children, including terms like "sus" (suspicious) and "rizz" (charm or charisma). It discusses the challenges parents face in understanding these linguistic shifts and the cultural implications of language innovation by younger generations.

CONTINUE READING

Namboodiripad et al. Publish in Language

Associate Professor [Savithry Namboodiripad](#) and a team of U-M students and alumni have published an article in *Language*.

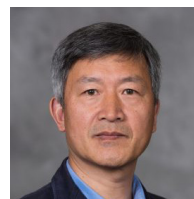
"Rejecting Nativeness to Produce a More Accurate and Just Linguistics"

READ ARTICLE

The Catford Lectures: Rediscovered and Digitized for Future Scholars

Explore John C. (Ian) Catford's influential "Catford Lectures," now digitized, offering insightful perspectives on 20th-century linguistics and engaging personal anecdotes. Click to learn more about this newly accessible treasure of the University of Michigan's linguistic history.

LEARN MORE



Duanmu Presents at Cornell

Professor [San Duanmu](#) presented "Feature Theory: Questions and Solutions" at the Cornell Linguistics Circle.

LEARN MORE

GRADUATE STUDENT UPDATES



Exploring the Intersection of Language & Politics

Language Matters hosted “Language & Politics,” featuring talks on the complex relationship between language and politics.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Kendall Lowe Promotes MICHHERS Program in Texas

Kendall Lowe traveled to Texas with Rackham’s PACE team to promote graduate opportunities, including the MICHHERS Michigan Humanities Emerging Research Scholars program.

[SEE MORE](#)



UM Linguistics at the LSA 2025 Annual Meeting

PhD Michigan Linguistics made a strong showing at the 2025 Linguistic Society of America Annual Meeting in Philadelphia this year.

[CONTINUE READING](#)

U-M Linguistics at TISLR 15

Addis Ababa University hosted the 15th TISLR conference from January 14-17, 2025, welcoming global sign language experts. Our Linguistics Department featured Sovoya Davis, Demet Kayabaşı, Natasha Abner, and alum Felicia Bisnath, who presented on diverse topics like African American Language gestures. Felicia Bisnath won a Student Award for her research on ASL users’ language experiences in the U.S.

[CONTINUE READING](#)

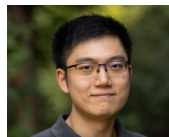
GRADUATE STUDENT PROFILES



Beyond Spoken Words: Exploring the Intricacies of Sign and Gesture

Originally from İzmir, Turkey, Demet Kayabaşı explores how humans conceptualize events and encode participants in sign language. Her research examines the relationship between nouns, verbs, and core human concepts like objects and actions.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Syntax Meets Neuroscience: Junyuan Zhao’s Path to Understanding Language

Junyuan Zhao, a third-year PhD candidate, researches how the brain processes hierarchical language structures. His work explores how minimal computational components enable effortless comprehension of novel structures.

[LEARN MORE](#)

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT UPDATES



Experimental Typology Fall 2024 Capstone Presentations

The Department of Linguistics hosted the Fall 2024 LING 497 Capstone Seminar presentations, showcasing students' hard work and the culmination of their academic journey at U-M.

[SEE MORE](#)

Congratulations, Linguistics Fall 2024 Graduates

Congratulations to the following linguistics major and minor seniors who graduated from the University of Michigan in December 2024:

Valeria Guzman-Barrientos
Sophia Hogan
Seth Kronick

Sandra Salman
Peyton Wadley*
Nathan Warshal

* denotes a minor in Linguistics



Transforming Futures with the Pre-Speech & Hearing Club

The Pre-Speech & Hearing Club (PSHC) has been crucial in shaping Alana Maffesoli's academic journey, offering guidance, support, and a sense of community. Her involvement has helped her navigate the challenges of pursuing a career in Speech-Language Pathology and build valuable connections with peers and professionals.

[SEE MORE](#)

your gift supports what's next

We love Linguistics and here's
why students do too

GIVING
BLUEDAY
03.19.25

My curiosity for the scientific study of language was born after I enrolled in a French class my second semester ever at the University of Michigan. Although I was undeclared, I intended to major in Biology when I first enrolled in 2020, but during my first two semesters I felt dissatisfied with my original choice. There was a disconnect between the subject I was studying and working so hard on, and what I was actually curious about. When it came time to enroll in classes for my second year of undergraduate study I kept thinking about the French class I had taken, and how out of all the classes I had taken so far, it was the only one to leave me with unanswered questions that reached beyond the course—not questions about the French language exclusively—but about all types of languages and how they are acquired. I decided to enroll in two Linguistics courses at the University of Michigan for my second undergraduate semester.

The effect that these new classes had on my motivation and excitement to study was immediate. As the semesters progressed I found myself becoming more and more intrigued with the areas of study regarding Linguistics. I became more interested in the interactions between technology and Linguistics but unfortunately it was hard for me to work at my job consistently every week in order to pay for rent and utilities and also have enough time and energy left over to give my studies the attention they deserved.

The Beatrice Oshika Scholarship for Undergraduate Study in Linguistics has been immensely helpful as I was able to cut down on the amount of hours I spend a week working this semester and give myself more time interacting with my classwork energetically and enthusiastically. This being my last semester studying at the University of Michigan as an undergraduate, having extra time to spend in my search for post-graduate employment has also been an invaluable gift. I am so grateful to Beatrice Oshika and The University of Michigan for these privileges.

Statement by a student awarded a scholarship funded by a gift from Dr. Beatrice Oshika to Linguistics.



givingblueday.org

PAST EVENTS

Linguistics MLK Colloquium

On Friday, January 17, the Department of Linguistics hosted [Nicole Holliday](#) from UC Berkeley as our MLK Colloquium speaker. She discussed her research on the impact of Large Language Models (LLMs) in her talk, "Sociolinguistic Competence Versus Artificial 'Intelligence'." Her studies revealed that technologies like Amazon Halo and Read.AI provided biased speech evaluations, particularly disadvantaging Black and neurodivergent speakers by enforcing narrow language standards. These systems ignored linguistic principles and perpetuated stereotypes, posing risks in employment and law enforcement, especially for marginalized communities.

UPCOMING EVENTS

2025 Colloquium Schedule

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

March 14 th	Andries Coetzee, University of Michigan
April 4 th	Amalia Arvaniti, Radboud University
April 11 th	Linguistics Graduate Student Colloquia <i>Danuta Allen and Sophia Eakins</i>

Watch our Colloquia today!

COLLOQUIUM YOUTUBE

Join us virtually for all our upcoming colloquia

ATTEND ON ZOOM

Upcoming Fall 2025

AGW5

Our department will host the 5th installment of the [Afrikaans Grammar Workshop](#) (AGW) on 5-6 September, 2025. AGW is the premier event to present research on all aspects of Afrikaans linguistics. The conference was founded in 2016 by Professor Andries Coetzee together with colleagues in the Netherlands, Belgium and South Africa, with the specific goal of making research on Afrikaans accessible to the broader international linguistic research community. Previous installments of the conference were hosted in South Africa (2016, 2023), the Netherlands (2021), and Belgium (2018). We are happy to host AGW in the USA for the first time!

NWAV53

We are thrilled that the University of Michigan will host the 53rd Annual New Ways of Analyzing Variation Conference from November 6-8, 2025. This year's conference will explore the theme "Sociolinguistics, Conflict, Justice, and Peace". We are able to introduce two of our plenary speakers: Dr. Sharese King from the University of Chicago and Dr. Lal Zimman from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Stay tuned for more updates on NWAV53, and keep in touch with us online at Michigan Linguistics.

ALUMNI PROFILES



Patrick Kelley
BA, Class of 2013

Advisors: Jonathan Brennan, Sam Epstein, and Andries Coetzee.

Career and professional highlights since graduating from U-M:

- PhD in Linguistics from Michigan State University (2018). Dissertation: “More people understand Eschers than the linguist does: the causes and effects of grammatical illusions.”
- Started work at Amazon as a Language Engineer working on Alexa devices
- Promoted to senior technical program manager in 2023
- Currently working with generative AI programs.

Current research and professional interests:

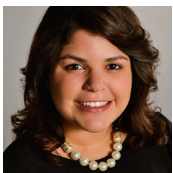
- Large Language Models and their impact on work, education, and culture
- Localization and Internationalization
- Exploring how language interacts with search behaviors
- Keeping up with Neurolinguistics

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

When I started my freshman year, I was not really sure what I was going to do. I decided to enroll in a wide variety of classes, including the physics of music, creative writing, anthropology, and a course called “Language and Mind.” I was particularly interested in that course because, until that point in life, I had never even heard of linguistics. I was the student who asked a million questions in class, and I was encouraged to explore and be curious. As a result, during my first semester at UM, I became a linguistics major.

While at UM, I didn’t really have any good idea of what to do with my linguistics degree, and as I approached my senior year, I was advised to pursue graduate school. At first, I wasn’t so sure, since five more years of school didn’t sound appealing at the time. However, through graduate work, I was able to expand upon the knowledge and experience I gained at UM, and I learned how meaningful it was to be a part of and contribute to the academic community. I consider UM the key turning point in my education and career.

When I started working at Amazon, I relied heavily on linguistics with my work at Alexa. Over the course of the next five years, I continued to learn new skills and pivoted to work as a machine translation engineer, and a technical program manager for search science, and today I focus on generative AI. However, I’ve never forgotten my roots from UM. To this day, linguistics continues to be a vital element in my professional and personal life.



Sarah Benatar
BA, Class of 2008

Advisor: Jeffrey Heath

Career and professional highlights since graduating from U-M:

Since graduating from U-M, I have dedicated my career to public service. In 2014, I began serving as the Coconino County Treasurer (Flagstaff, Arizona), becoming the youngest County Treasurer in the history of Arizona and the youngest female county official in the history of the state. Since coming into office, I have received national recognition for innovation and efficiency in government finance and treasury management, speaking nationally with organizations such as Governing and testifying before Congress.



Sarah Benatar

BA, Class of 2008

Continued...

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

Professor Lawler’s words always stuck with me: “Linguistics is the organic chemistry of words.” It teaches an analytic style of thinking, looking at how language works and connects from its structure, history, use, and meaning. This has been extremely important in my professional career, preparing me to approach problems and solutions as an interconnection between ideas, laws, and structures. As an elected official, my career is a blend of skills and values. One of those values is respect for the diverse cultures that represent my constituency. Language is one aspect of that diversity.



Kelly Wright

PhD, Class of 2022

Advisor: Patrice Speeter Beddor

Career and professional highlights since graduating from U-M:

- Distinguished Alumni Award from Pellissippi State Community College 2023.
- Best Paper in *Language* Award 2024: “Housing policy and linguistic profiling: An audit study of three American dialects.”
- Lead Editor for *American Speech’s Among the New Words Quarterly Dictionary*
- Convenor of the North American Research Network in Historical Sociolinguistics 2023-2025
- Assistant Professorship at University of Wisconsin-Madison - Fall 2024.

Current research and professional interests:

I remain interested in the pursuit of linguistic research to heal our institutions and create solidarity between researchers and communities. I continue to conduct policy-driven, community-engaged work as a scholar, public intellectual, and expert witness. Currently, I am outfitting a lab at UW that will be dedicated to creating datasets demonstrating indexical and contextual constraints on equitable linguistic perception. I am extending metalinguistic research into historical domains through large-scale documentation and analysis of African American newspapers. I also consult as a lexicographer for Today.com’s ongoing slang explainers project and similar initiatives for other outlets. Professionally, I am most interested in developing non-extractive research methods and reciprocal publication practices.

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

My time at U-M trained me in scientific rigor — as a researcher, experimentalist, and scholar. Producing work that approaches optimality involves curiosity, open-mindedness, and self-discipline. My years at U-M allowed me to understand how each of these necessary aspects of inquiry is elaborated during the research process. Additionally, through my experience as a Graduate Student Staff Assistant at the Rackham Program in Public Scholarship, I came to know how long-term community-engaged research projects are structured, funded, and reflected back to the academy as valuable and essential academic production.



Marcus Berger

PhD, Class of 2020

Advisor: Acrisio Pires

Career and professional highlights since graduating from U-M:

I'm currently a Social Science Analyst at the U.S. Census Bureau, in the Language and Cross-Cultural Research group in the Center for Behavioral Science Methods. Our research seeks to use qualitative data to inform linguistic and cultural decisions regarding questionnaire design, interviewer training, survey methods, and other related fields. As we begin preparations for the 2030 Census, I will likely have the chance to travel to various parts of the country to observe how we partner with local communities to ensure a successful Census!

Current research and professional interests:

I'm interested in how linguistic principles play a role in questionnaire design. This ranges from basic principles of pragmatics to the meaning encoded in words across languages. It has been especially fun to work across disciplines with other researchers on unique, collaborative projects.

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

As basic as it sounds, when I first started at the Census Bureau, two of my biggest strengths were performing quality research and presenting findings to others who were unfamiliar with the topic. Even though I was focused on a much narrower topic in graduate school, those foundations afforded me the chance to learn in a field I was less familiar with and to work collaboratively with others to produce novel and interesting research. I am very lucky today to be able to meld linguistics with the other research I do in survey design.



Jennifer Cole

BA, Class of 1982

MA, Class of 1983

Advisors: Donna Jo Napoli and Peter Hook

Career and professional highlights since graduating from U-M:

After my PhD in Linguistics (M.I.T., 1987), I taught at Yale University (1987-1989) and at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1989-2016), where I was also active in the Cognitive Science group. I moved to the Linguistics Department at Northwestern University in 2016, where I am currently the department chair. I was a founding member of the Association for Laboratory Phonology and the founding editor of the *Laboratory Phonology* journal.

Current research and professional interests:

My PhD thesis was in theoretical phonology, but in graduate school, I also took classes in computational linguistics and speech acoustics in other departments, and I continue this multidisciplinary interest today, drawing on theories and methods from adjacent fields to understand the nature of sound patterns in spoken language. My current focus is prosody, where I research the acoustic correlates of phrasing and prominence in English and many other languages and investigate how listeners perceive and interpret prosody in relation to syntactic groupings and pragmatic meaning. My work relies on computational and statistical tools that allow the research to be scaled up for use with ever-increasing data sets.

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

At U-M, I studied Spanish, Mandarin, and Hindi, and the remarkable phonological and phonetic diversity among these languages and English ignited my interest in speech sounds. I had the great fortune to study Hindi with Peter Hook, where I was first exposed to comparative syntax and lexical semantics, and syntax with Donna Jo Napoli, where I learned the art of linking empirical observations to formal theory through linguistic argumentation. I took Ian Catford's class in phonetics but didn't realize then how much I would benefit from his emphasis on producing and perceiving speech sounds from around the world. In his classes, linguistics was both a science and a performance art, and I hope to convey that sense of delightful play in my own teaching.

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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