

WINTER 2026

LINGUISTICS

NEWSLETTER



Inside this Issue

Letter from the Chair	3
Department Updates	4
We've Moved!	4
Conference Hosts	4
Faculty Updates	
Pam Beddor Retirement	5
In Memoriam: John Swales	5
In Memoriam: Joan Morley	5
Promotions	
Savithry Namboodiripad	6
Steve Abney	6
Ezra Keshet	6
Jelena Krivokapić	6
Faculty Awards/Faculty in Media	
Deen Mamadou and Andries Coetzee: Honored Instructor Award	6
Jessi Grieser: Ann Arbor Documentary	6
Ezra Keshet: Undergraduate Teaching Award	7
Lorenzo Garcia-Amaya: President's Award for Leadership in International Studies	7
Andries Coetzee: NPR	7
Jessi Grieser: Business Insider	8
Faculty Publications	
Nick Henrikson publishes in Journal of Sociolinguistics	8
Huteng Dai publishes in Phonology	8
Graduate Student Updates	
Congratulations to Recent PhD Grads	9
Graduate Student Awards	9
Welcome to New Cohort	10
Undergraduate Student Updates	
Graduation Class of 2025	10
Undergraduate Research	10
Alumni Profiles	
J.D. Lesada	11
Usha Lakshmanan	12
Sera Bird	13
Kevin McGowan	14
Get Involved	15

Letter from the Chair

Dear U-M Linguistics alumni and friends,

I am grateful for this opportunity to send you news from the U-M Linguistics community, a year since our last newsletter. Here are some highlights of what is featured:

The Linguistics Department moved in December to a new, temporary home in North Quad. I hope you visit us in our new grounds when you are in town! In the meantime, we are excited to participate in the design of a renovated and expanded Lorch Hall, where Linguistics is expected to move back to in a few years.

Professor Pam Beddor retired in 2025, capping a terrific career with many contributions to our department and the field, including her transformational tenure as department chair from 2004 to 2010. The Department has established a new award for outstanding graduate student scholarship in her honor. We wish Professor Beddor a fulfilling retirement, certain that her career will continue to inspire new generations of linguists.



This past year, four of our tenure-track faculty were promoted to a new rank, recognizing their successful scholarship (Steve Abney, Ezra Keshet and Jelena Krivokapic to professor, and Savi Namboodiripad to Associate Professor with tenure).

We are saddened by the passing of two of our former faculty in 2025, Professor Emerita H. Joan Morley and Professor Emeritus John M. Swales. Professor Morley was a pioneer teacher and author on English aural comprehension and pronunciation, with far-reaching influence on the teaching of English as a second language. Professor Swales leaves behind a legacy of decades of impactful work in Applied Linguistics, especially his groundbreaking work in genre analysis. Both Professor Morley and Professor Swales had an enormous and lasting impact on the career of many students and scholars in the field, and they are deeply missed.

In the Fall term the Linguistics Department hosted two prominent conferences. NWAV 53 New Ways of Analyzing Variation had the theme Sociolinguistics, Conflict, Justice and Peace. The 5th Afrikaans Grammar Conference featured presentations from scholars in the US, Europe and South Africa, including a keynote talk by U-M alum Paul Roberge.

With continuing restrictions in the higher education funding in the US, the department has increased its reliance on the support from our donors and gifts to help support different initiatives, including Linguistics colloquia and other academic events, research or travel abroad scholarships and need-based funding to support the successful education of undergraduate Linguistics majors, fellowship funding to help maintain the admission of our best graduate students, and research funding for innovative, collaborative research by our faculty and students. We are grateful for the generous gifts offered to the department by many of our alumni and friends like you. Your support has a real impact in the Linguistics education of students in the liberal arts and in advancing linguistics research of relevance for different communities around the world.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Acrisio Pires'.

Acrisio Pires

Chair, Department of Linguistics



Lorch Hall – Image Credit: VP Communications, Regents of the University of Michigan

We've moved!

Our department has moved to North Quad while Lorch Hall undergoes extensive renovations. Come visit us in our new home the next time you're on campus!

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Linguistics hosted two major conferences

We hosted two major linguistics conferences over the past few months. First, we hosted the 5th Afrikaans Grammar Workshop (AGW5) as an online conference in September. AGW is the premier international conference focused on the linguistics of Afrikaans. November then brought the sociolinguistic community together for NWAV53. NWAV is the premier international conference for research on sociolinguistics.



5th Afrikaans Grammar Workshop
AGW 2025
 University of Michigan

Call for abstracts closes 31 March
 Notice of acceptance 01 May
 Submit full papers 30 June
 Peer review feedback 31 July
 AGW5 05-06 Sept.
 Final paper submission 30 Nov.

Keynote Speakers
Hoofsprekers
Prof. Adri Breed
 North-West University, South Africa
Prof. Paul Roberge
 University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA

The workshop aims to bring together researchers from different theoretical and methodological perspectives who study Afrikaans linguistics (broadly defined). We particularly welcome submissions from students and early-career researchers.

myumi.ch/Dre2G

[READ MORE ABOUT NWAV53](#)

[READ MORE ABOUT AGW5](#)

Pam Beddor Retires

After a long and illustrious career at Michigan, Professor Pam Beddor retired at the end of the 2024/25 academic year. Professor Beddor is a world-renowned linguist and phonetician whose research has transformed both the theory and practice of phonetics. Her career exhibits distinction across-the-board as a researcher, academic leader, teacher, and mentor, and as a citizen of the University and the discipline of linguistics. *Continue reading below to see the beautiful statement made by the Regents to acknowledge Pam's contributions to U-M.*



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In Memoriam

We lost two members of our community over the past year.

Professor Emeritus John Swales was a longtime faculty member before retiring in 2006.



JOHN M. SWALES, 1938-2025

Professor Emerita Joan Morley similarly was a big part of the U-M Linguistics community until her retirement in 2004.



H. JOAN MORLEY, 1931-2025

Our sympathy goes out to their loved ones, and to all the many alumni whose lives were impacted by these great scholars.

Promotions

Several faculty were promoted this year. Congratulations to all of them! Savithry Namboodiripad was promoted to associate professor (with tenure). Steve Abney, Ezra Keshet, and Jelena Krivokapić were all promoted to full professor. *Click on their names below to learn more.*



SAVITHRY NAMBOODIRIPAD



STEVE ABNEY



EZRA KESHET



JELENA KRIVOKAPIĆ

Deen Mamadou and Andries Coetzee receive Honored Instructor Award



Tajudeen Mamadou (who served as the Language Learning Visiting Research Professor from 2023 to 2025, left) and Andries Coetzee (right) both received an Honored Instructor Award in 2025.

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Jessi Grieser in Ann Arbor Documentary

Professor Jessi Grieser was interviewed for the documentary, 'Right to Read: The Ann Arbor King Case' about the groundbreaking 1977 lawsuit that addressed the linguistic rights of Black students.



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[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

Ezra Keshet Receives Award for Undergraduate Teaching

Professor Ezra Keshet received the 2025 John Dewey Award. This award, given by the LSA Executive Committee, recognizes faculty who have made sustained contributions to the undergraduate experience.



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Lorenzo García-Amaya Receives President's Award for Leadership in International Education

Lorenzo García-Amaya, Associate Professor of Spanish and Linguistics, received the President's Award for Leadership in International Education, recognizing faculty who have made sustained contributions to the international education mission of the University.

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Andries Coetzee featured on NPR

Professor Andries Coetzee was featured in an NPR documentary about the importance of international education, and the recent South African tour of the U-M Symphony Orchestra.



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Jessi Grieser in the Business Insider

Professor Jessi Grieser talked to the Business Insider about how slang terms develop and the role that the Internet plays in that.

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Nick Henrikson Publishes in Journal of Sociolinguistics

Professor Nick Herniksen recently published a paper, co-authored by U-M alum Lucas Rubin (BA, BFA 2023), in the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*. The article explores how a prominent Andalusian athlete and media figure uses sociophonetic variation to construct different identities in different communicative contexts.

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[READ THE ARTICLE](#)



Huteng Dai Publishes in Phonology

Professor Huteng Dai recently published a paper in the journal *Phonology*. The paper develops a computational learning model for phonotactics that is robust against lexical exceptions.

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[READ THE ARTICLE](#)



Congratulations to Recent PhD Graduates!

Four PhD students graduated in the Winter 2025 semester. Congratulations to: Dominique Canning, Carrie Ann Morgan, Sophie Eakins, and Lucy Chiang! *Click on their names below to learn more.*



DOMINIQUE CANNING



CARRIE ANN MORGAN



SOPHIE EAKINS



LUCY CHIANG

Linguistic Department Awards

Several of our graduate students received awards to recognize their dedication to our mission, in both teaching and research. Congratulations to:

Kendall Lowe (left) and Martin Mössmer (right), who were awarded the Deborah Keller-Cohen Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching.



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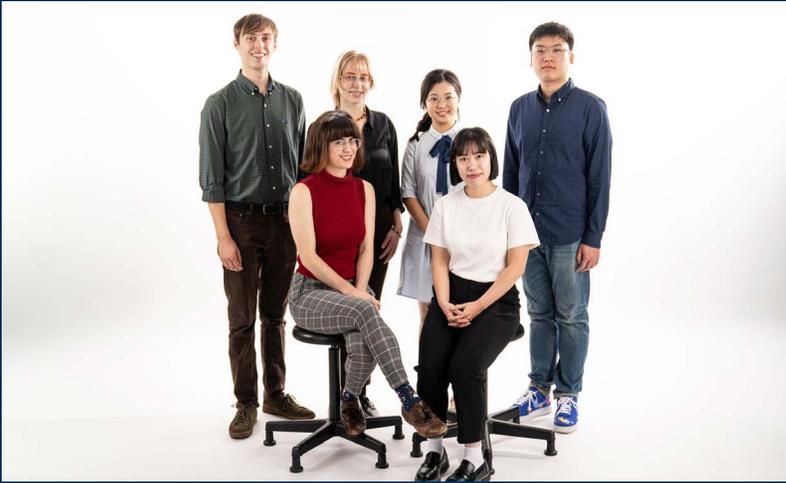


Demet Kayabaşı, who was awarded the Sarah Thomason Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Research.



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Welcome Fall '25 Grad Cohort



Back row (Left to Right):

Tate Russell, Sylvan Jesień, Yueke Zeng, Shunjie Wang

Front row (Left to Right):

Rachel McCullough, Hsin-Ju "Alice" Wu

Congratulations to Winter 2025 Grads!

Congratulations to the 82 undergraduate students who graduated with a minor or major in Linguistics!

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Honors Students Excel in Research

Read on below to learn more about research that our undergraduate students produced this year.

[READ MORE](#)

Students Participate in UROP Symposium

Cora Rolfes and Zora Tucker presented their research on "The demographics of academic publication in linguistics."



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"We continue to push interdisciplinary boundaries as we interface sociology with pragmatics or phonetics, when we analyze the syntax of contracts or business statements, and when we protect our language from bias or harm. We are beginning to see language for what it is – the method by which all information is communicated."

- Amer Goel,

2025 Graduation Speaker

Alumni Profiles

JD Lesada

Undergraduate, Class of 2017

Advisor: Marlyse Baptista



As a student at U-M, I was primarily involved in LSA Student Government, serving as an Elected Representative for multiple years. I was also in the Honors College, Campus Band, Global Scholars Program, and Filipino American Student Association.

Since graduating from U-M, I have established a career in nonprofits, philanthropy, and public policy. I currently serve as a Program Officer for the Governor's Office of Foundation Liaison, where I help to broker and strengthen partnerships and strategic collaborations between the State of Michigan and private philanthropy.

Prior to my work in public-private partnerships, I served as the director of operations for the Growing Michigan Together Council, a bipartisan, gubernatorial commission tasked with developing policy solutions to keep Michiganders in Michigan and attract new residents to our state. I also held various leadership and fundraising roles in Detroit's nonprofit sector, including as chief of staff at a housing solutions and homelessness services nonprofit and as a corporate fundraiser at the United Way for Southeastern Michigan.

I was recently contacted by a U-M librarian who manages the university's institutional repositories. She shared with me that my Honors Bachelors thesis from 2017 ("Taglish in Metro Manila: An Analysis of Tagalog-English Code-Switching") has been the most downloaded item in the entire repository of over 150,000 records for multiple years running. In 2024, it was downloaded 35,572 times! Although I've shifted from the academic field of linguistics, I'm very glad that this research lives on and continues to have an impact.

I can think of countless examples of the ways in which my linguistics education has influenced my career and been the bedrock of my work in public policy. Whether it's applying sociolinguistic concepts to building relationships or convening coalitions, maintaining syntactic precision in the technical work of writing and analyzing policy, or taking an analytic, research-based approach to solving Michigan's most pressing problems, I leverage the skills I gained as a U-M linguistics undergrad practically daily.

To continue to sharpen my ability in using language for the common good, I look forward to returning to the University of Michigan in January 2026 to begin the Master of Public Affairs program at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. Go blue!

Alumni Profiles

Usha Lakshmanan

PhD, Class of 1989

Advisors: John Swales and Susan Gass



My four years as a student at U-M (from 1985 to 1989) were memorable. While pursuing my PhD in Linguistics, I taught ESL and EAP courses at UM's English Language Institute (ELI) and Written Composition in the English Composition Board. Holding various RA positions in Engineering and ELI, I learned to apply linguistic analysis to assess the readability of scientific/technical texts. I was fortunate to work with experts in adult second language acquisition and use (Profs. John Swales, Larry Selinker, and Susan Gass). At UM through taking courses with Profs. Donna Jo Napoli, Peter Hook, and Madhav Deshpande, my initial goal expanded to include syntactic theory, typology of Indic/South Asian languages, and Paninian Linguistics. Courses in developmental psychology (taken with Prof. Marilyn Shatz) inspired my dissertation's shift to child second language acquisition. My dissertation was an empirical investigation of children's accessibility to Universal grammar in their English L2.

Upon graduating from U-M, I was a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Dept. of TESL and Applied Linguistics at UCLA (1989-1990). In August 1990, I joined the Department of Linguistics at Southern Illinois University Carbondale as an Assistant Professor. Moving smoothly through the ranks, I became a full professor of Linguistics in 2002. Since 2006, I've been a Professor in the Brain and Cognitive Sciences Program within Psychology (with a cross-appointment in Linguistics). Other appointments include: (i) Visiting faculty at the LSA summer institute in 2003. (ii) Visiting Professor at U-M (Fall 2004). (iii) This semester, I'm on sabbatical leave and I currently have a visiting professorship at MIT, where I am collaborating with Prof. Suzanne Flynn. (iv) Since 2020, I have been collaborating with the Language Acquisition group at UMass-Amherst: Tom Roeper, Deb Foucault, Jill de Villiers, Camelia Bleotu, Bing Bai and others. In my research, which focuses on the relationship between psycholinguistic theory and language acquisition, I have addressed several aspects of grammatical development and language processing from a cross-linguistic perspective. My research on Tamil Linguistics spans many years, with an emphasis on monolingual, bilingual/multilingual Tamil children's acquisition of morphology, syntax, and pragmatics. My current research examines monolingual and bilingual children's comprehension of recursive phrases, bilingual children's narratives, language development and maintenance in multilingual contexts, and second language acquisition of spoken Tamil by adult Nepali-speaking migrant workers residing in Chennai.

At U-M, I attended as many colloquia as I could, and this prepared me well in my career as a teacher and researcher. In the syntax classes I took with Donna Jo Napoli, I was able to hone my skills in syntactic argumentation, which I continue to draw upon in my current work. From Larry Selinker, I learned the art of critical thinking and the value of purposeful misinterpretation of previous researchers' statements to generate new ideas. My experiences at U-M also made me aware of the potential for naïve students of linguistics to bring fresh perspectives to bear on old problems. From John Swales, who was always proactive and looked out for the welfare of his students, I learned the art of successful research collaborations and the importance of connecting the most theoretical aspects with the most practical ones. It was at U-M that the seeds were planted for moving beyond research into the acquisition of English and to journey into the acquisition of other diverse languages—from Tamizh, Chinese, Japanese to Hindi and Bambara.

Alumni Profiles



Sera Bird

Undergraduate, Class of 2015

From 2012 to 2015, I worked with Acrisio Pires and Tridha Chatterjee analyzing relevant linguistic markers in English corpora from bilingual English and Bengali speakers. My independent study project was a corpus analysis of linguistic differences in Wernicke's and Broca's aphasia, with Nick Ellis as my advisor.

I graduated with a double major in Linguistics and BCN (Biopsychology, Cognition and Neuroscience), and a minor in German. I also continued studying piano with Christopher Harding and was active in the Campus Symphony Orchestra on violin.

After graduating, I lived in Japan teaching English as well as performing in concerts to support efforts to facilitate relationships between displaced natural disaster survivors and community members. In 2019, I graduated from the University of Sheffield (England) with a master's degree in Psychology of Music. During this program, I was selected for a work placement to investigate music and hearing impairment, including the experiences of musicians with hearing aids or cochlear implants. Currently, I work at Washtenaw Community College, where my department supports curriculum and assessment for almost 150 faculty across five academic divisions.

Teaching is my first love, and I'm grateful to continue to have been able to teach piano, violin and English for the past 13+ years. My family (led by my Japanese mother) founded an English as a Second Language (ESL) program at our church in 2014, initially to support the growing Japanese community in the area with conversational as well as professional English. As a bilingual Japanese-English speaker, I've applied my linguistics knowledge to train other teachers in specific sounds or grammar concepts more challenging for Japanese speakers learning English. It is a joy to see how learning a language can be a vehicle to build friendships, explore faith, share culture and foster a community for our international friends seeking a home-away-from-home as they adapt to living in the US.

My first linguistics course was the late Samuel Epstein's "Language and the Mind", which completely changed the way I analyzed language itself as well as how language was represented everywhere around me. Research and coursework at U-M trained me to be detail-oriented and patient with the often-painstaking processes involved in analyzing patterns in language. I was impressed by the faculty whose flexibility and insight into the multidisciplinary potential of linguistics allowed me to pursue my passion in the relationships between language, music and the brain. In this regard, I'm particularly grateful to Sam Epstein, Acrisio Pires, Marlyse Baptista, Nick Ellis and Jelena Krivokapic.

Alumni Profiles

Kevin McGowan

PhD, Class of 2011

Advisors: Pam Beddor and Steve Abney



I have been fortunate to help establish a new Linguistics doctoral program here at Kentucky, but the highlights of my career have been my collaborators and students. Life has few joys that compete with investigating questions you care deeply about alongside people you care about even more deeply.

Right now I am working toward a theory of speech perception that combines the insights of existing segmental and hybrid exemplar models.

Asking how my U-M linguistics degree influenced my career path is a bit like asking how a rocket engine influences a spaceship's flight! Michigan prepared me to be a phonetician who can teach sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, or syntax – sometimes all at once – with puppets. I was privileged to learn in an environment where theoretical, empirical, and social approaches to language are all considered equally valid, necessary aspects of linguistic scholarship and where faculty treated us graduate students with real, fundamental respect. I always try to live up to that standard.

Your gift supports our students

"I'm currently pursuing a degree in linguistics. It is my hope to become a librarian, and I therefore plan to pursue a masters degree in information sciences after I graduate from U-M. I like the idea of having a non-profit service where anyone can gain knowledge and entertainment through books, games, and the like. I also want to be able to serve the public, because it's fun to help and interact with different people everyday. This scholarship makes me get one step closer to my goal of becoming a librarian and assisting others."

"I am deeply grateful to have been selected as a recipient of the Beatrice Oshika Scholarship for Undergraduate Study in Linguistics and the Samuel Epstein Memorial Fund Scholarship for Transfer Students in Linguistics. These scholarships have had a tremendous impact on my academic journey. Because of these scholarships, I did not have to pay out-of-pocket expenses this semester, which has greatly eased my financial burden. It has also allowed me to focus more on my studies without needing to take on a second job. I'm truly thankful to have this stability as it also has made it possible for me to focus on my studies without having to worry about my finances."

- Statements by students supported by a gift from Dr. Beatrice Teodoro Oshika to Linguistics, and by the Samuel Epstein Memorial Fund Scholarship for Transfer Students in Linguistics.

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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