

L. R. Nikolai

She/Her/Hers

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

Sign Language, Semantics, Syntax-Semantics Interface, Gradability, Intensification, Modals, Iconicity, Event Structure

EDUCATION

PhD in Linguistics, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI Sept. 2019 - Present
In Progress
Achieved Candidacy Aug. 2023

BA in Linguistics, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN Aug. 2016 - May 2019
Minors in Classical Studies, Political Science, Spanish, & Russian

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Independent research under advisor Ezra Keshet

Lead Investigator Aug. 2023 - Present
Modals in American Sign Language (ASL)
• Investigating how the force and flavor are expressed, modified, or strengthened in ASL modals, both manually and non-manually

Lead Investigator Aug. 2020 - Present
Gradability on the Lower Face in American Sign Language (ASL)
• Testing the hypothesis that the non-manual markers made on the lower face in ASL share a common function as degree modifiers
• Annotating and analyzing corpus and elicited data to further characterize the occurrence of lower face non-manuals, such as “flat chin,” “tongue flaps,” and “puffed cheeks”
• Reviewing and synthesizing previous reports in the literature on the use of certain lower face non-manuals in both ASL as well as other sign languages, then comparing this to the broader semantic literature on degree modifiers and intensifiers
Gradability on the lower face in ASL: The flat chin
• A continuation of previous work on the flat chin, seeking to give a full semantic description of the flat chin as a cross-categorical intensifier of ASL and contextualizing it within the broader semantic literature on intensifiers and domain wideners

Lead Investigator Fall 2019 - August 2020
Co-Location of Associated Referents in American Sign Language (ASL)
• Annotated and analyzed corpus and elicited data nominal signs in discourse that share a locus in the sign space to indicate that they are semantically associated

- Analyzed previous literature on indices, co-location, and possession to better understand and contextualize the behavior of co-located nominals

Guided research under advisor Ronnie B. Wilbur (Sign Language Linguistics Laboratory)

Research Assistant May 2018 - Dec. 2018

Is There Regularity in the Irregular Behavior of American Sign Language (ASL) Verbs?

- Annotated and analyzed elicited ASL data from four native signers using ELAN to find patterns among 20 telic and 20 atelic verbs

Lead Investigator Jan. 2018 - Aug. 2020

Facial Expressions in Sign Language Grammar: What Does the 'Flat Chin' Mean?

- Annotated and analyzed ASL corpus data using ELAN to discover patterns in the non-manual marker (NMM) “flat chin”
- Noted several potential functions of “flat chin” in ASL, increasing knowledge of its linguistic purpose; data from project was intended to feed another project developing automatic recognition of NMMs

Peer-to-Peer Mentor Aug. 2018 - May 2019

- Trained three undergraduates to annotate and analyze sign language data
- Answered questions and addressed problems undergraduates had in the lab

Lab Assistant Sept. 2017 - Aug. 2019

- Developed and implemented an organizational system for lab files and books to improve ease of access
- Created guidelines for lab assistants to follow when annotating sign language data
- Collaborated with graduate students to streamline management of undergraduates in order to improve undergraduates' lab experience

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Nikolai, L. R., & Keshet, E. (2022, December). The chin as a domain widener in American Sign Language (ASL). In *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory 32* (pp. 404-412).

PRESENTATIONS

Nikolai, L. R., Keshet, E. R. (2022, June 8). The Chin as a Domain Widener in American Sign Language (ASL). *Semantics and Linguistic Theory 32 (SALT32)*, Mexico City, Mexico. [poster]

Nikolai, L. R., Wilbur, R. B. (2019, Sept. 26-28). The “Flat Chin” Marker in ASL. *Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research 13 (TISLR13)*, Hamburg, Germany. [poster]

Wilbur, R. B., Nikolai, L. R. (2019, May 15). What Does AU-17 ‘Flat Chin’ Mean? Workshop: *Automatic Recognition and Analysis of American Sign Language*, The University of Chicago. Chicago, IL, USA.

Nikolai, L. R., Wilbur, R. B. (2019, Apr. 9). Testing Predictions on AU-17: What Does the ‘Flat Chin’ Mean? *Purdue Undergraduate Research Conference*. West Lafayette, IN, USA. [poster]

Nikolai, L. R., Wilbur, R. B. (2018, Nov. 12). Facial Expressions in Sign Language Grammar: What Does the 'Flat Chin' Mean? *Purdue Fall Undergraduate Research Expo*. West Lafayette, IN, USA.

Nikolai, L. R., Wilbur, R. B. (2018, Sept. 29-30). Facial Expressions in Sign Language Grammar: What Does the 'Flat Chin' Mean? *7th Meeting of Signed and Spoken Language Linguistics (SSL2018)*. Osaka, Japan. [poster]

Nikolai, L. R., Wilbur, R. B. (2018, Apr. 10). Facial Expressions in Sign Language Grammar: What does the 'flat chin' mean? *Purdue Undergraduate Research Conference*. West Lafayette, IN, USA. [poster]

GUEST LECTURES

Nikolai, L. R. (2024, Apr. 10). Looking at Sign Languages More in Depth. *Yourdanis Sedarous's Lenses into Language (LING 111)*, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.

Nikolai, L. R. (2024, Apr. 8). The Basics of Sign Language Linguistics. *Yourdanis Sedarous's Lenses into Language (LING 111)*, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.

Nikolai, L. R. (2023, Nov. 27). The Basics of Sign Language Linguistics. *Yourdanis Sedarous's Lenses into Language (LING 111)*, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.

Nikolai, L. R. (2022, Apr. 11). Looking at Sign Languages More in Depth. *Charlie O'Hara's Introduction to Language (LING 111)*, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.

Nikolai, L. R. (2022, Apr. 6). The Basics of Sign Language Linguistics. *Charlie O'Hara's Introduction to Language (LING 111)*, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.

Nikolai, L. R. (2021, Nov. 29). Looking at Sign Languages More in Depth. *Ezra Keshet's Introduction to Language (LING 111)*, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.

Nikolai, L. R. (2021, Nov. 22). The Basics of Sign Language Linguistics. *Ezra Keshet's Introduction to Language (LING 111)*, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.

Nikolai, L. R. (2021, Apr. 14). The Basics of Sign Language Linguistics. *Ezra Keshet's Introduction to Language (LING 111)*, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.

Nikolai, L. R. (2020, Nov. 9). The Basics of Sign Language Linguistics. *Jelena Krivokapic's Introduction to Language (LING 111)*, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor

Lenses into Language (LING 111)	Spring 2023
Introduction to Language (LING 111)	Spring 2022

Teaching Assistant

Lenses into Language (LING 111), Lead TA for Yourdanis Sedarous	Winter 2024
Lenses into Language (LING 111), Lead TA for Yourdanis Sedarous	Fall 2023
Sound Patterns (LING 313), TA for San Duanmu	Winter 2023
Introduction to Language (LING 111), Lead TA for Charlie O'Hara	Winter 2022
Introduction to Language (LING 111), Lead TA for Ezra Keshet	Fall 2021
Introduction to Language (LING 111), TA for Ezra Keshet	Winter 2021
Introduction to Language (LING 111), TA for Jelena Krivokapic	Fall 2020

HONORS, AWARDS, & GRANTS

University of Michigan Rackham Travel Grant (\$1150)	June 2022
University of Michigan Pre-Candidacy Research Grant (\$1500)	March 2021
University of Michigan Rackham Travel Grant (\$1000)	Sept. 2019
University of Michigan Linguistics Block Grant (\$500)	Sept. 2019
1 st place Liberal Arts Poster, Purdue Undergraduate Research Conference (\$300)	Apr. 9, 2019
Purdue University Outstanding Senior in Linguistics (\$300)	Apr. 3, 2019
Purdue Office of Undergraduate Research Scholarship (\$1000/semester)	Fall 2018, Spring 2019
Purdue University Wilke Internship (\$500/semester)	Spring 2018, Fall 2018, Spring 2019
1 st place in Purdue Fall Undergraduate Research Expo	Nov. 12, 2018
Purdue Office of Undergraduate Research Travel Grant (\$500)	Oct. 2018

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Sign Language Linguistics Society	2019-present
Linguistic Society of America	2019-present
Eta Sigma Phi (Classical Languages Honor Society)	2018 – 2019

SERVICE

Social Chair, Purdue Linguistics Association	2018 – 2019
Treasurer, Purdue Classics Club	2017 – 2019
Treasurer, Purdue Russian Club	2017 – 2019

LANGUAGES

English – *Native*
American Sign Language – *Highly Proficient*
Spanish – *Conversational*
Russian – *Conversational*
Classical Latin – *Reading Knowledge*
Old English – *Reading Knowledge*
Portuguese – *Rudimentary*

TECHNICAL SKILLS

ELAN
LaTeX
Adobe Photoshop
Adobe Premiere
Adobe InDesign
Microsoft Word
Microsoft Powerpoint
Microsoft Excel
Certified fMRI Secondary Operator, Purdue University