

Learning Objectives, Undergraduate Linguistics

The Department of Linguistics intends that a student graduating from USC with a major in linguistics should be prepared to pursue graduate studies in linguistics, and in theoretical, rather than anthropological or social, linguistics in particular, given the research specialties most of the primary faculty.

The Department recognizes that few undergraduate students will choose a career in linguistics. At the same time, the analytical skills involved in theoretical linguistic research---amongst them, careful attention to data collection, and coverage of it in principled description and explanation; making use of diverse researches and ideas in a collaborative manner; a capacity to present one's own work for criticism as well as the criticism of others' points of view---certainly cross over into other subjects, from law to medicine to international relations, and many others.

Both historically and in our curriculum the recognition that human language is a great equalizer---that no languages are more "primitive" or less "refined" than others, but rather all languages are "essentially perfect," as Edward Sapir once put it---plays an important role in linguistic education. Several of our undergraduate courses, including Ling-374, Language and Society in East Asia, play a signal role in our program. Likewise, our course Ling-422 on Language Contact and Acquisition, including recently created languages such as African-American English, underscore the systematic importance of recognizing that human children don't just pick up what's around, but in an important sense make it up, pulling things together in new ways.

The Psychological, Neuroscientific, and Experimental aspects of linguistics form part of the content of our GE courses and advanced courses alike. These subjects are comparatively new, and make use both of modern experimental methods and contemporary perspectives on language and the mind, including mental representations of language, systems of perception and production, and aphasia and other language deficit. We intend these subjects to be part of basic education about language, as in Ling-275, Language and Mind, and other GE courses. We intend them also to attract and inform students interested in Neuroscience, Computation, and Psychology.

Finally, the abstract study of language, and particularly of semantics, is of critical importance for the profession of Law, and has been part of mainstream Philosophy from Plato onwards. We therefore offer, either within Linguistics or cross-listed, courses in these areas.

In sum, the objectives of the Department of Linguistics comprise material aimed at majors aspiring possibly to careers in the subject; general education and information about language that is critical for understanding its place in the human world, both socially and psychologically; and material for majors in a great variety of fields whose undergraduate educations will be advanced by the kind of critical study and discipline that our field has to offer.