

Self-Determined Major in Linguistics

Student Name

Cumulative GPA

Mobile Number

Advisors

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Linguistics is “the scientific study of language,” a definition that is necessarily vague to be able to encompass the massive variety of sub-fields, which study one or more languages through many different lenses. According to the 25th and most recent edition of *Ethnologue*, a reference publication considered to be a primary authority in the field of linguistics, there are 7,151 “living” languages, although there could be more or fewer, based on one’s distinction between a “language” and a “dialect”¹. Across these languages, linguists study a myriad of topics, including how language imports meaning, how people physically form sounds, how language develops across time, and many more.

Language is a phenomenon deeply engrained within our lives and our understanding of it is mostly instinctive. One rarely thinks about the underlying mechanics. The most common goal of an undergraduate linguistics major is “the enrichment of knowledge about the nature, grammar, and history of human language.” Middlebury, for example, offers “a variety of courses that introduce students to many of the sub-areas of modern linguistics”². A self-determined Linguistics major would therefore focus on introducing or expanding knowledge of as many of these sub-fields as are available.

Linguistics as an academic study is split up into several sub-fields. The Linguistic Society of America frames many of these sub-fields in a linear progression from specific to broad.

At its narrowest, Phonetics and Phonology study “the physical properties of human sounds”³, which the latter studying their groupings and how these groupings are patterned across languages⁴. Morphology studies how words are formed while Syntax expands this focus to sentence structure⁵. Finally, Semantics and Pragmatics study the concept of meaning in a linguistic statement. The former primarily focuses on the words and their arrangement in relation to meaning, while pragmatics specifically studies how words interact with context to create meaning⁶.

These sub-fields make up the methodologic heart of Linguistics, but there are many others. Psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics studies language in relation to psychology while

¹ “How many languages are there in the world.” *Ethnologue*. Accessed February 19, 2022. <https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/how-many-languages>.

² “Linguistics.” Middlebury College. Accessed March 10, 2022. <https://www.middlebury.edu/college/academics/linguistics>

³ “Linguistics.” Middlebury College. Accessed March 10, 2022. <https://www.middlebury.edu/college/academics/linguistics>

⁴ “Studying Linguistics.” Linguistic Society of America. Accessed December 25, 2022. <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/studying-linguistics>.

⁵ Chung, Sandy and Pullum, Geoff. “Grammar.” Linguistic Society of America. Accessed December 25, 2022. <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/grammar>.

⁶ Ladusaw, William. “Meaning (Semantics and Pragmatics).” Linguistic Society of America. Accessed December 25, 2022. <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/meaning-semantics-and-pragmatics>.

historical linguistics and etymology tracks and reconstructs how languages have changed over time⁷.

An undergraduate Linguistics major would undertake, to summarize, a survey of these linguistic fields. Additionally, Linguistic majors may or may not require their students to study a second language. "While many [linguistics students and scholars] are fluent in other languages, linguists are not necessarily multilingual."⁸ That being said, because language learning offers valuable insight into how we think about language, in addition to necessitating a deeper look at linguistic structures, it can be an invaluable part of a well-rounded linguistic education.

Specific Aspects of the Program

(2.2a) Linguistics is, as a field of study, quite distinct from any offered at Skidmore. Instead of a self-determined major, one could argue that I could simply study French or another language as a major. It is true that through pure language studies I have gained greater knowledge and appreciation of the study of language itself. However, linguistics is a very broad field with many specificities to it. Personally, I am specifically interested in Historical Linguistics (of which Etymology is a sub-field), Phonetics, and Translation. These interests 1, cannot be thoroughly explored with a French major or any other at Skidmore and 2, are not limited to the French and English languages.

French is a large interest of mine and I intend to continue with it as a minor, but I am not confident that the French program will explore the linguistic concepts that are of primary interest to me. Not only that but studying the linguistics of the French language alone is not my intended focus. Obviously, French will play a large factor in the examples I draw from, but I more interested in studying it in the context of other languages (and being able to make comparisons between language).

French is undoubtedly going to play a large role in my studies, but as one example that I am familiar with. I am also planning to start introductory work in two other languages. Translating is something I'll likely only be able to do with French/English, but I plan to use these other languages as examples and bases of study for Historical Linguistics and Phonetics. With majoring only in one language, I would be depriving myself of the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic analysis that I am truly passionate about.

(2.2b) However, the dearth of resources at Skidmore does pose a problem: how am I to fill out a curriculum when we do not have a linguistics program or anything like it at Skidmore? The answer is study abroad. Like public health majors, I will be using my study abroad as an opportunity to study at a university that does have a linguistics program and use the courses, I take there as the core of my curriculum.

⁷ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "historical linguistics." Encyclopedia Britannica, August 6, 2010. <https://www.britannica.com/science/historical-linguistics>.

⁸ Holder, Kathleen "What Can I Do With a Linguistics Major?" UC Davis, February 25, 2021. <https://www.ucdavis.edu/majors/blog/linguistics/what-can-i-do-with-linguistics-major>

Specifically, I will be taking three pure linguistics courses and several other supplementary courses (French and other languages) during my study abroad in Montpellier, France during the 2022/2023 school year. I will elaborate on these courses later in the proposal.

At Skidmore, I will be relying on the World Language department as well as direct contact with several professors. So far, I am planning to begin an Independent Study with Professor Rebecca Johnson of the Psychology department.

In addition, I will be using the tool that has served me best in my pursuit of linguistics so far: personal research. During my foray into linguistics, I have found that there is a breadth of knowledge online and more in print. Linguistics is an old and well- documented field, and its literature is often surprisingly accessible, depending on the author. I have and will continue to use these resources in and outside of the various courses of my linguistics major.

Course Information

(3.1) Foundation:

- PS101 Introduction to Psychological Science (4 Credits)
- WLF206 Communicating in French I (4 Credits)

(3.2) Methodology

- WLF363 Advanced French Grammar and Methodology (3 Credits, taken at Paul Valéry in France)
- MONT3014 French Phonetics (Phonétique) (3 Credits)

(3.3) Theory:

- TE62SLL Historical Linguistics (Linguistique Historique) (3 Credits)
- TE41SL Énonciation (Énonciation) (3 Credits)
- ID351 Language and Thought (4 Credits)

(3.4) Other Core Courses:

- PS212A Psychology of Language (3 Credits)
- TE28IT, Italian (Italien) and TE28PO, Portuguese (Portugais) (these two courses are both 1.5 credits, and therefore will be listed here as a single course).
- WLI102, Elementary Italian II (3 Credits)

(3.5) Capstone

- SD 374, SDM Final Project Prep Seminar (1 credit)
- ID 371 (3 or 4 credits)

Total 43-44 Credits

Disciplinary Breadth

Disciplines incorporated into this major include World Languages (French, Italian, and Portuguese), Psychology, and Linguistics.

Language: TE28IT, TE28PO, WLI102, WLF206, WLF 363, and MONT3301

Psychology: PS101, PS212A, ID351

Linguistic Theory: MONT3014, TE41SL, TE62SLL

Advancement of Studies

Sequences which move from 100 level to 300 level occur within the disciplines of Language, Linguistics, and Psychology

TE28IT, TE28PO, WLI102 → WLF206 → WLF 363, and MONT3301

MONT3014* → TE41SL* → TE62SLL

PS101 → PS212A → ID 351

*TE4X classes are second year courses at Paul Valéry, loosely equivalent to a 200 level course. The same is true of TE6X courses and 300 level courses.

Academic Year	Fall	Spring
2021-2022		Communicating in French I
2022-2023	Advanced French Grammar and Methodology French Phonetics	Historical Linguistics Énonciation Italian Portuguese
2023-2024	Intro to Psychology SDM Final Project Prep Elementary Italian II Language and Thought	Psychology of Language SDM Capstone

1. WLF206: Communicating in French I 4 Credits

Study and practice of interpersonal communication skills to develop fluency in French speaking, writing, reading, and listening, with some emphasis on oral skills. Students will deploy new vocabulary across various registers, learn complex grammatical structures, and improve their pronunciation. Students will also engage with authentic fictional and non-fictional material from French and Francophone literary and visual cultures. They will participate in class discussions and writing assignments designed to help them achieve a high-intermediate level in French.

Communicating in French I is a clear pre-requisite to all of the courses I have taken here in France, equipping me with the ability to comprehend and produce my own work in French. It's also helped me progress to the point of proficiency with a second-language, which for my curriculum is very important for the study of linguistics.

2. MONT3301: Advanced French Grammar and Methodology (WLF 363 Special Studies in French) 3 Credits

This course will allow students to acquire the written and oral skills necessary for pursuing a university curriculum in France. These acquired proficiencies will therefore be interdisciplinary in nature and will provide the students with the ability to adapt to different types of academic writing that are unique to the French system. Acquiring methods of structuring and organizing assignments, and a thorough reinforcement of grammatical knowledge will also be course objectives.

Advanced French Grammar and Methodology is a class taken at Paul Valéry, with the aim of strengthening and enriching my understanding of the French language while also equipping me with tools to write in an academic register. As a 300-level equivalent language class, it brings me to proficiency with the French language and enriches my understanding of language in general.

3. MONT3014: French Phonetics (WLF 228: Language and Phonetics) 3 Credits

This course provides an in-depth study of French phonetics. In class, students will practice oral production as well as improve their listening comprehension skills by working in the language lab. In addition, during these language-lab sessions, the professor will work one-on-one with students to improve their pronunciation. Over the course of the semester, students will also discover regional pronunciation differences, and grasp what it means to speak with a Parisian or Marseillais accent. By the end of the course, students will have a much better grasp of pronouncing French properly and will have acquired all the tools necessary to progressively improve as they continue with their study of the language. The following topics are covered: the phonetic alphabet, prosody, closed vowels, the unstable "e," rules for liaison, linking, semi-vowels, consonant chains, semi-open/semi-closed vowels, nasals, rhythm, intonation, and accents.

Phonetics provides the basis of the "theory" section, giving me the tools to talk about produced sound in terms of the IPA, the International Phonetic Alphabet. Despite being a 200-

level equivalent, Phonetics serves the role of an introduction class in Linguistics, as it has provided me with the tools to talk about and think about language, in addition to being the course that initially stoked my interest in the field.

4. TE62SLL: Historical Linguistics 3 Credits

The Romance languages constitute an excellent laboratory for observation and a unique field for historical and comparative (socio)linguistics because of the numerous and diverse documented sources available to the teacher or researcher, which attest not only to the internal history of Latin and the Romance languages, but also to the social, political, and economic factors that have accompanied and influenced these dynamics within different "linguistic communities" and/or communicative spaces. This course will deal with a fascinating social history: that of a language (Latin) which was transformed and gave birth to a whole linguistic family (the Romance family).

Historical Linguistics delves into the history of languages, specifically those that originated from Proto-Indo-European. As the 300 level linguistics course, Historical Linguistics builds off of the vocabulary and understanding of Phonetics and the philosophy of Énonciation to provide a conceptual understanding of how language develops over time.

5. TE41SL: Énonciation 3 Credits

In enunciation, it is assumed that every utterance is an arrangement of operation markers (mental operations); these construct a text from representations and inter-subject regulation (between enunciator and co-enunciator). Essentially, language does not mainly have a descriptive function but an actional function: through the activity of language, we do not describe the world but carry out language acts such as ordering, promising, wishing, asserting, arguing, etc.

Énonciation is a class mostly relating to the field of "semantics" and "pragmatics." Instead of methodology, this class focuses on the philosophy behind language, speech, and meaning.

6. TE28IT: Italian and TE28PO: Portuguese 3 Credits

The courses train students in the four core language skill areas (listening, writing, speaking, and reading). During classroom sessions, students will participate in activities and are expected to use as much of the target language as possible to improve their language abilities. Audio and visual aids, including realia will enhance the learning experience.

Concurrently with my other work, I will be starting Italian and Portuguese in France and continuing to work on them at Skidmore. The purpose of these courses will be to provide my work in linguistics with a more varied breadth of examples to pull from, rather than just French and English.

7. PS101: Intro to Psychology 3 Credits

An introduction to the science of psychology through a survey of theories, methods, and principles of behavior. Students will learn about empirical studies that are central to the various subdisciplines of psychology.

Intro to Psychology is a pre-requisite for the courses I will be taking in psycholinguistics.

8. WLI102: Elementary Italian II 3 Credits

Continuation of WLI 101. Further development of basic grammar, reading, conversation, and writing skills while focusing on cultural materials from Italy.

This course will continue my non-French language studies to provide a wider variety of linguistic knowledge. As I am drawing from the available resources at Skidmore, I will only be able to continue studying Italian and not Portuguese.

9. PS212A: Psychology of Language 3 Credits

An examination of the psychological mechanisms necessary to learn, comprehend, and produce both spoken and written language. The course addresses questions such as: How do people acquire the ability to comprehend language, speak, read, and write? What are the cognitive processes involved in everyday language usage? What is the brain's role in language and what can we learn about language from patients with brain injury? These questions and more are addressed while investigating the psychology of language from a scientific perspective, looking at what psychological research can tell us about human language acquisition, comprehension, and production.

This class will form one of the cornerstones of my linguistics major. I will be taking this 200-level course as an independent study with Professor Rebecca Johnson. It will provide an overview of psycholinguistics.

10. ID 351 Language and Thought 4 Credits

Language and thought are intimately connected in human beings, but how exactly are they interrelated? Does the specific language you speak change how you experience the world? Do humans think and experience the world differently than other animals because of our unique linguistic abilities? Are human language abilities in fact unique in the animal kingdom? In this class, we will look to both historical and contemporary psychologists and philosophers to interrogate the nuances of the relationship between language and thought. In particular, students will read, write, discuss, and think about how different cultures and species perceive and represent such concepts as gender, agency, time, space, number, and color. Prerequisite: PS 202 or one PH course.

Capstone Project

For my capstone project, I am planning to do an independent research project with the aim of pushing my own understanding of linguistics and creating a concrete result of my labors. The project will be a documentation of regional American accents, using an extensive but accessible phonetic approach to describe the specific sounds of various accents.

The project will feature audio obtained from recordings and interviews. Some sections will follow specific words and their pronunciation in various accents. For example, "route." Other sections will take the opposite approach, looking at the accents and describing their phonetic commonalities.

The project will also take a look at the concept of phonological change, i.e., how pronunciation has changed over time. The timeframe for this part of the project will be relatively recent, only the last hundred years, but will focus specifically on the effect of technology such as the radio and internet on accents.

Finally, my research project will aim to incorporate a cultural understanding of accents, specifically with regards to systems of oppression. Another word for discrimination based on accent is glottophobia. I plan to explore how the concepts of accent, race, and social status can be entangled in America.

In summarize, my capstone project will be an independent research project consisting of a cultural, social, and historical understanding of American accents, but will be grounded through specific phonetic analysis. Examples may be drawn from outside of America or the English language, but the focus of study will be America.

Depending on the scope of the project, I may narrow my focus to only a few accents (rather than cutting the different lenses of analysis). This narrowing will potentially be extensive. If I find this work is too time consuming, I may focus on only a single region, or even on only one or two accents if I wish to deepen my analysis.

