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Ling 565: Program Reflection

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May 25, 2026

I am someone who loves media with a passion; it is the only hobby I wouldn't want to taint by turning it into work. In 2022, I watched a movie about a professor whose prime directive, other than miraculously speaking four languages, was to find a way to communicate with aliens that had landed on Earth, naturally. This person was a bit of a Mary Sue--few flaws, conspicuously knowledgeable, and conventionally attractive--so it came to no surprise that I looked at this character and thought *now that looks like an interesting job*. A quick Google search later and I had my answer: I wanted to be a linguist. It's fitting and perfect in its irony that one of the first things we learn in our program is the general misconception that linguists are all multilingual polyglots (I have yet to find solid evidence that we *wouldn't* be helpful in an alien invasion). And though many of us do indeed know other languages, there is so much more to language, its uses, and all the things it means to *know* a language. I would be remiss if I didn't also mention that two years into my program, the movie that inspired me to become a linguist received a scathing review from one of my linguistics professors, mid-class and unprompted--the jokes really do write themselves.

Growing up, many of us are subjected to a seemingly one-dimensional, prescriptivist approach to language, grammar, and speech. Learning to analyze language beyond the sentence level is very jarring at first; you feel like a traitor to your formative repertoire and wonder if your old teachers will *find out*. Courses like Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics, and Language, Identity, & Culture emphasized that meaning is born through context, interaction, social expectations, and interpretation. It's interesting how discourse regulates participation, identity, and access to social systems. I dare not circle back to *the movie* so soon, but there is a scene that suggests language might be the cornerstone of human civilization. Seeing how catalytic language is, this feels plausible; however, it would feel feverish to constitute the conversations I have with my cat as *any* kind of cornerstone to *any* kind of civilization, so it remains open-ended. Concepts such as politeness strategies, implicature, deixis, register, and conversation analysis *did* affect the way I reckon with everyday conversation. I noticed that every interaction involves negotiation: people negotiate identity, authority, expertise, solidarity, and even belonging through language.

At the same time, our program introduced me to analytical and research skills that I had little familiarity with. You know those scenes that show computer hackers button mashing their keyboards whilst lines of binary flash across their glasses--this is exactly how I feel now. Research in Applied Linguistics and Corpus Linguistics helped me develop quantitative literacy alongside qualitative analysis. I learned how to interpret research articles, evaluate methodologies, conduct corpus-

based analyses, use concordance software such as AntConc, and understand statistical procedures such as t-tests, ANOVA, chi-square, and log-likelihood analysis--its positively cinematic. Before entering the program, statistics and corpus methods felt like something out of a Philip K. Dick novel and oh-so sci-fi; now I see they are tools, tools that I am allowed to wield for identifying discourse patterns that the human brain just can't compute in a timely fashion.

Luckily for me, there was a lot of cross-pollination between our course and my interests in culture, storytelling, design, and communication. I also entered our program already fascinated in political rhetoric, media, humor, and behavioral economics. The program gave me theoretical frameworks for understanding why those interests mattered linguistically. For example, I have always found most public apologies annoying, ingenuine, and overall sedating \*said from the couch\*. Now I have the language to articulate *why* (thanks, Pragmatics!). Psycholinguistics complemented these interests from a cognitive perspective by examining how humans process meaning, reference, and non-literal language in real time. Most importantly, we learned that cognitively, audio books experience little to no degradation in comprehension versus manually reading a book; I only wish I could buy some sky-space in Times Square and spread *that* gospel. Meanwhile, Language, Identity, & Culture and Theory and Practice of Applied Linguistics expanded my understanding of language as part of a larger social apparatus, with institutions, and historical power relations.

I think it's worth mentioning that during my time at PSU, AI was suddenly thrust into existence and without our permission. Two of my courses have already explicitly assigned interaction with this new technology as part of the curriculum. For my Digital Skills course, I analyzed how Reddit users linguistically construct agency and social identity through romantic AI-human relationships. Historically, some approaches to discourse analysis have focused more on how people construct text interactions rather than how texts might construct people. In these romantic relationships, Generative AI constructs text that a person can technically interact with. This is an entirely new form of mediated discourse analysis. I am under the impression that we should find new ways to describe the process of AI-human discourse and develop new taxonomies to describe these acts in the age of burgeoning digital technologies. It is a new type of discourse that relates deeply to existentialism, emotions, love, ideas of romance, and what it means for humans to have meaningful connections.

Our work is expansive in this program; I do feel as though the glue at the seams is a recurring focus on meaning-making in various systems. In our courses, we repeatedly end with questions about membership, identity, power dynamics, participation, accessibility, communication, and so much more. If I were advising someone entering the program, I would strongly encourage them to keep an open mind about what they might *enjoy*, I know that it'd be tempting to try to specialize too early. At the beginning, I thought I would thrive in topics like curriculum design, discourse analysis, and pragmatics, yet the classes that were naturally

suiting for my brain were topics like comparative linguistics, syntax, and morphology--which would be like someone saying they'd prefer an ice bath over a nice, warm, hug. So, you don't know what you want until you've had it. I would also encourage students to keep copies of their projects, syllabi, reflections, readings, and assignments; you never know when you're going to need them (and you will need them). Additionally, I would recommend that students engage more with digital and technical skills earlier in the program, especially as language technologies and AI systems continue to affect communication industries.

Looking back, I am particularly glad that I pursued projects that blended academic analysis with creative or real-world applications. The projects I'm most proud of happen to be the projects I am also most interested in: my film script corpus, my psycholinguistics video essay, and my pragmatics + design module. I am still unsure if that is because of the topic or the vehicle in which the assessment came. For example, if given the opportunity to use skills in my personal repertoire, like art, a conventional assignment becomes that much more exciting for me. That is something that will certainly influence me, were I ever to explore teaching. Those projects made the program feel less abstract and more personally meaningful. If I could change anything, I would probably spend more time earlier in the program developing stronger quantitative and technical skills, as those areas became increasingly important to my later interests in digital tools, technologically mediated texts, and UX-oriented work.

In the near future, I hope to continue working in areas that combine language, technology, and design. In the longer term, I see applied linguistics as a foundation that can support work in education, research, AI communication systems, discourse analysis, UX strategy, and public-facing communication. The degree has provided both theoretical frameworks and practical analytical tools that I can continue building upon. I think this degree has made us all fantastic generalists; I am confident that with enough time, I can spam *many* companies in *many* industries with the skills taught in this program. It is the perfect earl grey blend of quantitative, qualitative, humanist work.

### Appendix

Course	What I recall
Discourse Analysis 516	Texts + texture; texts + their social functions; discourse + ideology; spoken discourse; strategic interaction; context, culture + communication; coherence + cohesion; deixis; genre + register; face + politeness strategies; big D little d discourse; conversation analysis; mediated discourse analysis; corpus-assisted discourse analysis
Language, Identity, & Culture 531	Culture blends, the circle – the circle around language that isolates grammar + dictionary but leave culture out; language + culture – a brief history; linguistic anthropology; cultural signifieds; languaculture; cline of formality; rich points, time-language continuum; speech acts; coherence; variations on frame; Boaz; Gee;
Curriculum Design 575	ESL/EFL curriculum design; syllabi; lesson plans, materials; SLOs; SWBATs; DEI resources; environment; needs analysis; goals; content; sequence; materials for target groups; adopting and adapting existing course books; negotiated syllabi; monitoring & assessment; evaluation
Theory and Practice of Applied Linguistics 535	Language revitalization; media discourse ideology; digital literacy; transdisciplinary action research; professional communication; multilingual + multicultural workplace; progression analysis; theoretical models in applied linguistics; identity; membership; Vygotsky; Pennycook; Tollefson; M. Lau; real-world linguistic problems; CIAL; language myths; language + identity; language + power; critical applied linguistics; research methods in applied linguistics;

	linguistic landscape; documentation + revitalization; language policy + planning; translation + interpretation multilingualism; English as a lingua franca (ELF); machine translation; augmentative and alternative communication devices; language pathology; forensic linguistics; computational linguistics
Corpus Linguistics 576	Corpus-based analysis; corpora use; corpus software; language variation & register analysis; KWIC searches; keywords; collocates; n-grams; POS-tags; COCA; critical discourse analysis; AntConc; digital humanities; statistics in corpus analysis; vocabulary lists; linguistic diversity and corpus design; lexicography
Research in Applied Linguistics 565	Supplemental article analysis; thematic synthesis of research articles; article critique; research literacy; applied linguistics; sources; epistemological frameworks; qualitative + quantitative; titles + abstract; purposes + rationales; research questions + arguments; discourse analysis of research articles; CARS model; literature review; references; APA formatting; inferential statistics; quantitative procedures; comparison of means; t-test; ANOVA; log-likelihood; chi-square; DV; IV; frequency; quantitative methods; methods sections; quantitative results; correlation; qualitative methods; peer review; Spielman + Radnofsky; Jin; Valleo + Spada
Pragmatics 514	The linguistic sign; constatives; performatives; speech acts; cooperative principle; Gricean implicature; Speech Act Theory and action; indexicality; face; politeness + apology; Saussure; Pierce; Grice; Austin; Searle; conversation analysis; transcription; turn, + sequence; closings; repair; story

	telling; reference; compliments; inviting; opening
Psycholinguistics 533	Cognitive models; cognitive theory; speech production; speech errors; speech perception; semantic access; lexical access; bilingual lexical access; sentence processing; discourse processing & reference; non-literal language; reading; cognitive experiment proposal
Digital Skills 509	HTML + basic AI querying; virtual webpoems; CSS; front-end development; incunabula; digital portfolios; data feminism; AI + publishing; authorship
Morphology 518	Derivation; inflection; syntax; endocentric compounds; exocentric compounds; zero-derivation; acronyms; clipping; folk etymology; backformation; agent; passive voice; productivity; cumulative exponence; declension; conjugation; tense; mood; voice; aspect; polarity; degree; attributive; predictive; noun properties; person; number; gender; definiteness; case; isolating; agglutinative + inflecting typology; valency; unaccusative + ergative verbs; passivization + causativation; antipassive; applicative; leveling,
Activist Applied Linguistics 509	Q-methodology; homelessness; water access; water insecurity; environmental justice; protocol; survey development; drought + judgement; socio-hydrology; framing of homelessness; natural disaster differential in media portrayals of displaced + houseless folks; ethnographic interview methods

Also: Ling 390 introduction to linguistics, 391 introduction to applied linguistics, 392 applied English grammar(?), 407 senior seminar: conlang, 415 phonetics, 411 syntax, 438 second language acquisition, 420 historical + comparative, 490 history of the English language