

How did you first become interested in linguistics?

I had been interested in translation for a long time, and when my college advisor asked that magical question —“What do you want to do in the future?” — I said that my dream career was to become a translator. My advisor recommended that I take a linguistics course so I could better understand what “meaning” is and how words combine to create it. That is how I took my first Introduction to Linguistics course. Very quickly, I came to realize that human language is truly one of the most fascinating and complex things in the world, and I knew that linguistics was something I wanted to keep studying. So, I declared a Linguistics major in my sophomore year and have been studying it ever since.

How have you been involved in the Linguistics Department outside of your coursework?

I served as a co-president of the Northwestern University Linguistics Student Association (NULSA). As a student, NULSA played an important role in broadening my own journey in linguistics: through its events, I learned about research opportunities at and beyond Northwestern and connected with fellow students and faculty members. Because I benefited so much from the organization, I wanted to give back by serving as co-president and continuing to support other students in the same way. This year, I would say we were quite successful in publicizing research opportunities, facilitating connections among students and faculty, and promoting linguistics to the broader Northwestern community. I was delighted to see strong participation in our events. It was also a pleasure working with Maya, the other co-president, and I am grateful that we became friends through organizing the events together.

Can you briefly describe any research projects in linguistics that you’ve been involved with?

During my senior year, I worked closely with Dr. Jiayi Lu on an independent research project on island effects and information structure. Through this project, I wrote my first grant proposal, ran my first experiment, and presented my first conference poster. I am deeply grateful for both the challenges and accomplishments that came with this experience, it also confirmed my desire to continue studying linguistics and pursue an academic career. In addition to my own research, I worked as an interview transcriber for Dr. Annette D’Onofrio’s Chicagoland Language Project, which investigates language and life in the Chicago area. This job gave me the opportunity to get involved in sociolinguistic research and develop technical skills such as using ELAN. Beyond all the work, it was a fascinating experience to hear people share their stories with Chicago.

How do you see your linguistics major fitting into your career plans after graduation?

I will be continuing my graduate studies in linguistics at the University of Oxford. After that, I hope to pursue a PhD in Linguistics and work in academia. There are way too many things to learn in linguistics, and I see it as a lifelong dedication.

What advice would you have for students considering a linguistics major?

Language is such a fundamental part of our everyday lives! Even a simple moment like me speaking and you listening now involves uncountable linguistic phenomena. Once you take a linguistics course and start to see the world through a linguistic lens, you will really begin to notice it everywhere. Linguistics is also incredibly interdisciplinary. It connects naturally with cognitive science, communication studies, anthropology, English, philosophy, law, and so many more fields! Because language is so fundamental to human life, studying linguistics really opens up many different academic and career paths. I encourage everyone to give linguistics a try. The department at Northwestern is super supportive, and the curriculum offers a great deal of freedom to explore your interests. If you have questions, don't hesitate to talk to Dr. Erin Leddon, the NULSA co-presidents, or any faculty member in the department!