

Linguistics Demoz Prize Winner 2021

Michael Senko:

- **How did you first become interested in linguistics?**

I studied both Mandarin and Latin in high school. The two languages could not be more different orthographically, morphologically, etc., and the experience made me wonder how diverse our language systems can be while still achieving the same goal of communication. This led me to enroll in a linguistics class my first quarter at Northwestern—and then I fell in love!

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

I have been a member of Sociogroup with Professor D’Onofrio since my second year and variably attend the Racial Justice in Linguistics reading group. I also worked on a research project with Professor D’Onofrio and am developing my thesis project with Professor Voigt.



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

Starting in the spring of my first year, I transcribed interviews for Professor D’Onofrio’s Chicagoland Language Project, or ChiLang. Later, as part of a project investigating variation in the pronunciation of “Chicago,” I collected “Chicago” tokens, recorded instances of metalinguistic commentary, and performed a brief literature review. I learned so much from the experience and still find the project fascinating!

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

I want to spend a few years teaching and/or working in education management after graduation—currently figuring out the what and the where! After that, I hope to continue my study of linguistics and head to grad school for (tentatively) linguistic anthropology. Regardless, I know the critical thinking skills and social science perspective developed through the major will help me down whatever path I find myself on.

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

Like language, linguistics is incredibly diverse. Through the major, you learn so much about human cognition and social identity while picking up some fun, useful skills along the way. If you’re more humanities-oriented, I’d recommend taking an introductory sociolinguistics course. And, if you’re not, start with one of the 250/260/270 suite—they’re very different and very interesting in their own ways! Once you’re hooked, ask faculty about research opportunities and join a research group. They are a great way to meet people and to understand where the field is going.

Thank you for your continuing support to the Linguistics Department!

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