

GO BEYOND BOUNDARIES



Language and Linguistics

UNDERGRADUATE GUIDE

How to study Language & Linguistics...

Language is the very essence of what makes us human, setting us apart from all other species. Linguistics helps us analyse, discuss and model this fascinating human attribute so that we understand ourselves and human societies more fully.

At the University of Aberdeen, you can study Language & Linguistics in several different ways:

As a single honours degree - this means that Linguistics is your main subject of study. In your first two years, you will study at least 105 credits in Linguistics, picking up another 135 credits from elsewhere in the university. In third and fourth year, you will study only Linguistics and also complete a research project for your dissertation.

As a pre-honours elective - even if you don't want to study Linguistics as part of your named degree, there are still plenty of opportunities to take our courses in first and second year. This is because you are required to take 120 credits per year; only a portion of this will be in your degree subject(s), leaving plenty of room to try other things.

As a joint honours degree - this means that you will study Linguistics alongside another subject. You still have to do at least 105 credits of Linguistics in your first two years; however, in third and fourth year, your credits will be split evenly between your two subjects and you will also choose which subject you would like to do your dissertation in. Current joint honours options include: English, Philosophy, Sociology, International Relations, Psychology, Anthropology, Archaeology, History, French, German, Spanish & Latin American Studies, Gaelic Studies, Mandarin and Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies.

First Year Courses

Students who plan to work towards the MA in Language and Linguistics will take three courses in their first year.

Language Structure and Use

This course opens up new ways for students to think about language by introducing them to the fundamentals of English linguistics. Students will learn how to identify and analyse the major “building blocks” of language in phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Examples for illustration and discussion will be drawn from varieties of English spoken in the British Isles and worldwide, with lectures and tutorials geared to providing students with an active vocabulary with which to discuss language, and essential tools with which to analyse its structure and function.

Recommended texts for this course are:

- *The Study of Language* by **George Yule** (7th edition, 2020)
- *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* by **David Crystal** (3rd edition, 2018)

English Past and Present

How do we get from Beowulf to ‘bae’? From Chaucer to ‘sashay away’? This course will look at the development of English over the last millennium and beyond, examining language changes in sound, structure and meaning. You will also be introduced to present-day study of English, its spread as a truly global language, and how all of this can add to our understanding of language in the modern world and in the past.

Living Language

How does the way we use language shape our lives, and how does the way we live shape the language we use? Moving beyond strict notions of structure, this course explores communication in practice, examining how language works in various contexts and cultures. It addresses contemporary social issues that are principally or partly communicative in nature, challenging common misconceptions and giving students an understanding of the contribution awareness of language can make to numerous fields.

Language Myths

Students will learn to critically engage with commonly held beliefs about human language and what current linguistic research has to say about them. This entails that students will be equipped to read and assess the quality of a range of different sources on language, including primary literature.

The course will familiarise students with several tools for investigating linguistic data and hypothesis testing in general.

Whether it's about which languages are easier to learn, how our linguistic experiences shape our cognition, or whether learning more than one language from birth will have any (dis)advantages – this course will make students experts in dismantling over-simplified or false beliefs about the standout ability of our human race: to communicate with the intention to be understood and believed and share our knowledge.

Second Year Courses

Language in Society

Language is central to our humanity. Language and society are inextricably linked. Language unites; language divides. This course will develop your understanding of the social nature of language, providing insight into, among other things, the relationship between gender and language, language death and the issue of language policy and planning.

Elements of English

This course investigates layers of language structure through examination of speech sounds, word formation, and sentence construction. We will consider the theory behind these areas, looking at how they function independently and interact. Students will gain skills to undertake analysis of language structure and think critically about structural elements fundamental to English.

**STUDENTS IN 3RD
AND 4TH YEAR
SELECT HONOURS
COURSES, WITH
VARYING CHOICES
EACH YEAR.**

Examples of Honours Options

Language Contact

Linguistic varieties come into contact regularly in our everyday existence. These contacts can amount merely to a few words being borrowed, but they can lead to much greater conclusions, where a variety's nature is so changed that its ancestry cannot be reconstructed. This course covers how contact through language death, bilingualism, imperialism and new settlement can create a new linguistic variety.

Phonology

This course aims to introduce students to a range of phonological approaches, beginning with the classical phonemicist approach, and moving on to consider topics including the role of syllables and metre and the development of models in generative phonology including differences between rule-based phonologies and constraint-based theories.

Dissecting Sentences

We all string words together without thinking, but how does this process actually work? What makes the difference between a meaningful phrase and word salad? In this course we will explore the structure and meaning of sentences through the study of syntax.

Language and the Professions: A Sociological Perspective

In professional discourse, language is used not only to communicate, but to gatekeep, to enact, to form and preserve identities, and to negotiate, challenge, and wield power. This course examines language use within the legal, educational, and medical professions, as well as from the so-called 'blue-collar' professions of domestic and factory work and investigates the ways in which language is used and to what effect.

Comparative Minority Language Planning for Linguists

With particular focus on the Celtic languages, this course introduces core concepts in language planning and policy, and critically examines theories relating to language shift and to contemporary methods of reversing language shift.

Language Rights & Revitalisation

Linguistically, we consider all languages as equal, but we know society does not always treat them as such. In this course, you will learn about the challenges faced by minoritised language communities and gain a critical appreciation of the language maintenance and revitalisation efforts currently underway.

Information Structure

In this course, students will critically engage with some of the principal concepts in research on Information Structure — the study of how we ‘package’ information in communication, such as Focus, Topic and Givenness.

Phonetics

This course involves investigation of acoustic phonetics: the analysis of soundwaves in order to identify different phonetic features. Each week there is a seminar to introduce phonetic theory, followed by a practical in which you will learn how to use freely available software to conduct acoustic analysis of your own and others’ voices.

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition is a human feat like no other. This course looks at how people come to know languages, using existing research in the field and real-life examples to examine stages of linguistic development and theoretical approaches to this hotly debated complex process.

Perception, Prescription, Prejudice

Beliefs about language and the ‘correct’ way to use it often serve as a proxy for larger prejudices, sometimes with profound social consequences. This course explores different means of researching attitudes towards language and the influence of prescriptivist ideas in linguistic spheres and beyond.

Stylistics

This course enables students to apply skills of close linguistic analysis to a range of literary texts and genres. Students will explore the ways that different aspects of linguistic structure shape and contribute to readers’ interpretations.

Historical (Socio)linguistics

Language change is an absolute reality. It happens to real people in real contexts. This course will provide you with an advanced but practical sense of the mechanisms by which language changes.

Discourse Analysis

Students will examine what the study of discourse reveals about the nature of language, social interaction, power relations, and the construction of meaning. They will also learn the basic principles of analytical methods for discourse analysis.

Honours Dissertation

Dissertation in Language & Linguistics

Along with coursework, final-year Language & Linguistics students write an Honours dissertation. This is students' chance to plan and carry out an independent research project in any area of Linguistics under the supervision of a member of the department.

We have training sessions in various research skills to prepare you for your dissertation work; these are also valuable in encouraging you to develop some widely transferrable skills.

Previous topics have included:

- Meme generation in social media
- A comparison of linguistic features used in children's and adult fiction by the same author
- An apparent-time study of the ways in which self-proclaimed Doric speakers display the Scottish Vowel Length Rule
- Faroe Islanders' attitudes towards Danish, English and Faroese: A Sociolinguistic Study
- How is gender represented using language in Disney movies?
- Defamiliarisation in the Representation of Political Discourse in Hamilton: A Stylistic Analysis of the Speakers' Communicative Success in 'Cabinet Battle #1' and 'You'll be Back'
- Language Planning: The Successful case of the Catalan language and how it was reintroduced.

Teaching and Learning

Lectures are a key part of the student experience. In each of our first year courses there are two lectures every week, in which the subject content is presented and explained. Where appropriate, technology such as Powerpoint presentations and audiovisual resources are used. Most lectures are recorded and are available to watch again on the MyAberdeen learning environment.

You also have weekly small **tutorials**, in which you have the opportunity to discuss material introduced in lectures and work on additional questions arising from the course.

Individual **reading** and **personal study** are an important part of your work as a student. The library has a wide range of relevant resources for Language & Linguistics, and you are likely to spend a good deal of time there.

You will also be asked to work in small groups in your tutorials, and several of our courses include **group projects** as part of the assessment for the course.

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Our current students will be very happy to answer
your questions about studying at Aberdeen!

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