Proposal for a Student-designed Interdepartmental Major in Linguistics

Kaitlyn Harrigan 2009
February 25, 2007

My interest was sparked in the study of Linguistics during Psychology 111 when we studies Psycholinguistics and language acquisition. Although I have always been fascinated by language and language learning, this was the first time that I had thought about studying language itself. I decided to take PHI 236, Linguistic Structures, to find out more about the study of Linguistics.

Linguistics is about looking at human language from many different perspectives and indifferent ways. There are many different topics within the field of Linguistics, including phonetics, semantics, syntax, morphology and more. The field that I am particularly interested in and have had the most exposure to at Smith is that of child language acquisition, the study of how children learn their first language. It involves looking at children’s speech development and making observations about how they learn and making predictions as to why.

Since I first became interested in Linguistics, I have been able to find out much more about it through many opportunities that I have had at Smith. I did psycholinguistic research through the Psychology department during my sophomore year, working on a longitudinal study of a 4-year old native Dutch speaker’s acquisition of English. I was also fortunate to work for the Psychology department during the summer of 2007 as a Summer Science Fellow working on several research projects related to child language acquisition. I learned about setting up and conducting a linguistic experiment as well as the process of collecting and analyzing the data. This past January I was also able to use my PRAXIS funding to do research at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. This was a great opportunity for me to be exposed to topics in Linguistics that had not been available to me at Smith. Doing research there was also a factor in my decision to try to further my education in the field of Linguistics. I have also had the chance to take three Linguistics classes at UMass Amherst through the 5-college exchange, allowing myself to expand my knowledge of Linguistics in fields less closely related to my supporting departments at Smith.

The study of Linguistics involves many different intersecting subjects, including the two departments that are supporting my theoretical major: Psychology and Philosophy. One of my particular interests in the field of Linguistics is that of child language acquisition, which has many ties with Psychology as it deals with children’s development and the processing of language in the brain. Language processing in adults is also related to Psychology and the study of the human brain. While child language acquisition is closely related to Psychology, there are areas within this subject that are looked at differently by Linguists and Psychologists. For example, in the linguistic study of language acquisition, there is more of a focus on the syntax of children, namely their sentence structure and its development. Philosophy also has a large overlap with the field of Linguistics, particularly in the area of Semantics and analyzing the meaning of words and sentences. Although both these topics are related and play important roles in my study of Linguistics, studying these topics alone does not suffice. Linguistics involves looking specifically at human language over a broad range of topics, such as sentence
structure, word meaning, language acquisition and processing, phonetics and more. Some of these areas are covered by or related to my two supporting departments and others aren’t. For this reason, studying Psychology and Philosophy alone does not suffice.

I have been very fortunate to have the opportunity to learn a lot about Linguistics, and I am confident that after Smith I want to further my education in this field. During my senior year, I plan to write a senior thesis, supervised by Jill de Villers in the field of child language acquisition, specifically looking at children’s acquisition of definite and indefinite articles. Having Linguistics as a major will be an advantage for me while applying to Graduate programs in this field. Although Psychology and Philosophy are both have close relations to Linguistics, studying the two of these alone simply does not suffice for my future plans.
Student:  Kaitlyn Harrigan
Class:  2009
Box:  6948
Proposed title of major:  Linguistics

Basis for the major:
1. PHI 236: Linguistic Structures
2. LING 401: Introduction to Syntax (University of Massachusetts)
3. LING 411: Language Acquisition (University of Massachusetts)

Dimensions of the major:
4. PSY 112: Research Methods (theme: Language)
5. LING 503: Intermediate Syntax (University of Massachusetts)
6. LOG 100: Valid and Invalid reasoning
7. SPN 1306: Topics in Spanish Phonology and Linguistics (PRESHCO)
8. PHI 220: Incompleteness and Inconsistency: Topics in the Philosophy of Logic
9. LING 501: Introduction to Semantics
10. ENG 118: Colloquia in Writing: Mixing Memory and Desire: Language and the Construction of Experience
11. CLT 150: The Art of Translation: Poetics, Politics, Practice

Depth of the major:
12. PSY 313: Research Seminar in Psycholinguistics

Integrating Project:
13. PSY 400: Thesis, with supervisor Jill de Villiers
PHI 236: Linguistic Structures
Introduction to the issues and methods of modern linguistics, including morphology, syntax, semantics, phonology and pragmatics. The focus will be on the revolution in linguistics introduced by Noam Chomsky, and the profound questions it raises for human nature, linguistics universals and language acquisition.

LING 401: Introduction to Syntax (University of Massachusetts)
Introduction to syntactic theory, with implications for universal grammar and grammatical theory in general. Topics include theories of phrase structure, the form and functioning of transformations, grammatical relations, anaophora and control, word order problems, universals of grammar, relations between grammatical theory, learnability, and language acquisition.

LING 411: Language Acquisition (University of Massachusetts)
How does a child choose one grammar from a million possible grammars? How are grammar and thought alike and not alike. Stresses the child's use of an inborn linguistic mechanism to produce creative sentences. Acquisition of syntax and semantics from the one-word stage through complex utterances. Linguistic principles as a window to unconscious principles of mind. Recent discoveries in the area of complex syntax. Students learn to search naturalistic data and do a small experiment. Prerequisite: LINGUIST 201.

PSY 112: Research Methods in Psycholinguistics
Introduces students to a variety of methods used in psychological research. All sections of this course will cover the basic methodological techniques of contemporary psychology such as observational, experimental and survey methods. Sections will differ in the particular content theme used to illustrate these methods. (Jill de Villiers; content theme: Language)

LING 503: Intermediate Syntax (University of Massachusetts)
This course investigates the common syntactic properties underlying human languages. This is done by comparing similar linguistic structures in a variety of related languages and teasing apart the phenomena that seem constant from the parts that seem to vary. This process also showcases how to construct and evaluate theories of syntactic phenomena. Prerequisite: Linguistics 401 or 401H.

LOG 100: Valid and Invalid reasoning
Formal logic and its application to the evaluation of everyday arguments, the abstract properties of logical systems, the implications of inconsistency. Examples drawn from law, philosophy, economics, literacy criticism, political theory, commercials, mathematics, psychology, computer science, off-topic debating and the popular press. Deduction and induction, logical symbolism and operations, paradoxes and puzzles.

PHI 220: Incompleteness and Inconsistency: Topics in the Philosophy of Logic
Among the most important philosophically intriguing results in 20th century logic are the limitative theorems such as Gödel’s incompleteness theorem and Tarski’s demonstration of the indefinability of truth in certain languages. A wide variety of approaches to paradoxes have emerged in the wake of these results, as well as a variety of alternative logics in which contradictions are tolerated. This course examines logical and semantic paradoxes and their philosophical significance, as well as the choice between accepting incompleteness and inconsistency in logic and knowledge. Prerequisite: one course in Logic.

SPN 1306: Topics in Spanish Phonology and Linguistics (PRESHCO)
A review of Spanish phonology with an eye toward improving pronunciation and facility in identifying different accents and dialects. Together with extensive class work, students may choose to participate in a practicum working with local non-governmental organizations or in other settings to increase contact with contemporary language usage.

LING 510: Introduction to Semantics (University of Massachusetts)
With lab. Introduction to the investigation of meaning from a linguistic, philosophical, and psychological point of view. How do words get their meanings, and how do we combine simple meanings to create complex ones? How can new meanings be created on the spot? What does context contribute to meaning? How are meanings connected to syntactic structure and intonation?

ENG 118: Colloquia in Writing: Mixing memory and Desire: Language and the Construction of Experience
How does language construct what it attempts to describe? What is the connection between words and worlds? Readings will focus on the delights and dangers of language's transfigurative power, with a particular emphasis on the way words define social, cultural and individual identities. Assignments include three short analytical essays, an oral report, and a research paper on a memoirist of your choice.

CLT 150: The Art of Translation: Poetics, Politics, Practice
We hear and read translations all of the time: on television news, in radio interviews, in movie subtitles, in international bestsellers. But translations don’t sift texts transparently from one language to another. Rather, they revise, censor and rewrite original works, to challenge the past and to speak to new readers. We’ll explore translation by hearing talks by translators and experts in the history and theory of translation. Students will look at translations from around the world and experiment with translating themselves. Knowledge of a foreign Language useful but not required. Graded S/U only.

PSY 313: Research Seminar in Psycholinguistics
Topic: Language Diversity and Child Language Assessment
The seminar will focus on assessment of language development, considering issues of dialect and cultural differences, and the nature of language disorders in 3- to 7-year-old children. The background research, design and data from the first testing of a new diagnostic test for bilingual Spanish speakers, will be central topics of the seminar.
PSY 400: Thesis, with supervisor Jill de Villiers
This is a full-year course.
This will be a psychological research project working on language acquisition of children.
COURSE LIST
STUDENT-DESIGNED INTERDEPARTMENTAL MAJOR
(Bold font notates the classes for my major in Spanish and Portuguese)

Student: Kaitlyn Harrigan
Class: 2009
Box: 6948
Proposed title of major: Linguistics

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<th>Courses required for the major</th>
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Tentative Subject of Integrating Topic: Linguistics
Advisers for the integrating Project: Jill de Villiers
CHECK LIST
FOR APPLICATION FOR STUDENT-DESIGNED INTERDEPARTMENTAL MAJOR

Submit all items listed below together with this check list to the Chair of the Subcommittee on Honors and Independent Programs, College Hall 23, no later than November 15 or April 15.

Name: Kaitlyn Harrigan  Class: 2009  ID: 9905-81465  SMITH Email: kharriga@smith.edu  Box: 6948
Title of proposed major: Linguistics

1. Application (see page 1 “Form of the Application”)

2. List of all courses to be taken both inside and outside the proposed interdepartmental major for the Smith degree; courses closely related to those required for the major should not be proposed as being “outside the major” and will not be accepted as counting in that category (see page 3 “Course List”)

3. List of courses in the major with an explanation of the relevance of each (submit on a separate sheet or sheets)

4. Description of integrating topic (submit on a separate sheet)

5. Statements of support on department letterhead from two or more advisers, at least one of whom must be a tenured member of the Smith faculty.
   Primary adviser’s name: Jill de Villiers  Department/Program: Psychology
   Additional adviser’s name: Jay Garfield  Department/Program Philosophy

6. Signatures of the chairs of the departments or programs of the advisers. AT LEAST ONE DEPARTMENT OR PROGRAM MUST ITSELF OFFER A MAJOR.
   Department or Program ___________________________________________ Date: __________________
   Name (print) ___________________________________________ Signature: __________________________
   Name (print) ___________________________________________ Signature: __________________________
   Date: __________________

********************************************************************
I understand that the Subcommittee on Honors and Independent Programs will review this application and notify me of its action within approximately four weeks.

If my application for an interdepartmental major is approved, I agree to submit to the Subcommittee on Honors and Independent Programs all subsequent revisions of my course program approved in writing by each of my advisers.

Student’s name: __________________________ Signature: __________________________ Date submitted _________

Submit all items listed above and this check list to the Chair, Subcommittee on Honors and Independent Programs. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Subcommittee action: APPROVED ___ DENIED ___ Date _______ Date registrar notified _______ Date student notified _______
Signed __________________________ Date _______
   Dean of the Senior Class and Chair of the Subcommittee on Honors and Independent Programs