

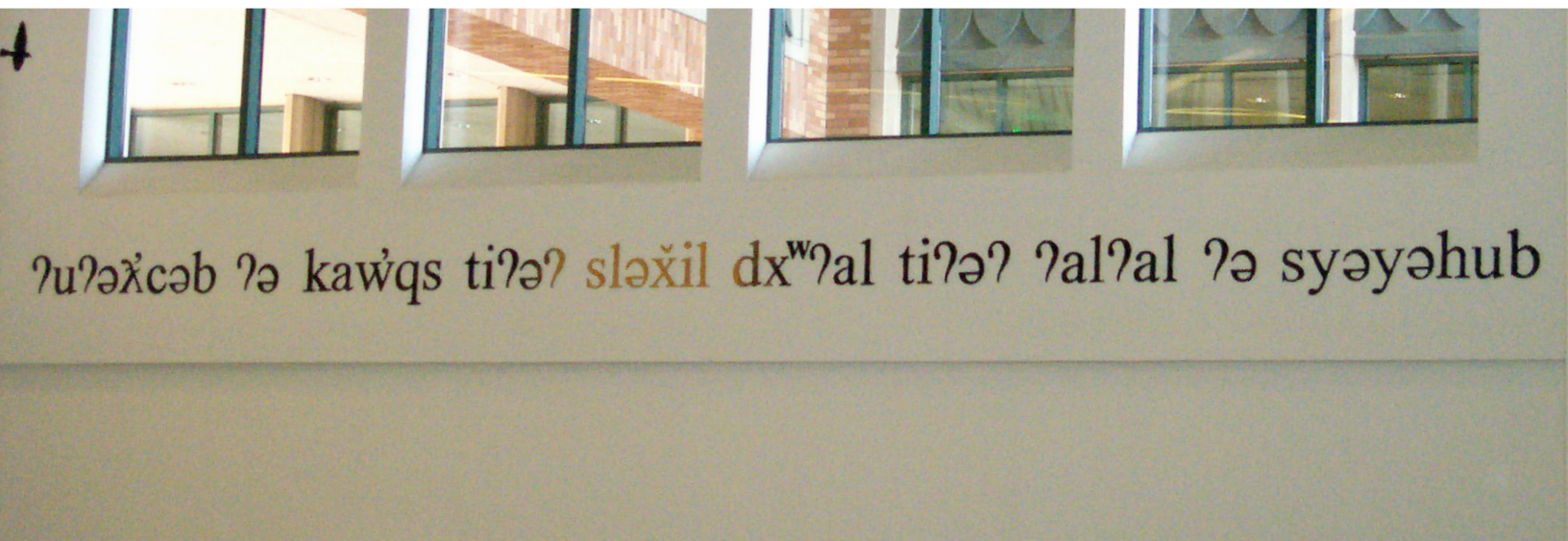
# W

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS

# NEWSLETTER

Autumn, 2020



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## Message from the Chair

I am writing to you as we prepare for the 2020-2021 academic year and as I prepare to begin my second five-year term as departmental chair. Looking back at the 2019-2020 academic year we must acknowledge the profound changes to our lives brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. I am deeply grateful to the Linguistics faculty who, with almost no notice, heroically moved their teaching online to accommodate the university's response to the pandemic, and who taught their students with compassion and empathy. I would also like to acknowledge the incredible hard work on the part of our graduate and undergraduate students who adjusted to learning online and completed their coursework while overcoming difficult obstacles. Our faculty and students did this from home while adjusting to schools and daycares being closed, while caring for loved ones, and without the infrastructure that the university campus provides. They are truly inspirational. Like most of the rest of the country, our university and city was rocked by anti-racism protests; our department stands in solidarity with Black communities in the U.S. and with the greater BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community in their fight against systemic racism. Our departmental Antiracism Statement can be found at this link:

<https://linguistics.washington.edu/news/2020/06/30/uw-linguistics-anti-racism-statement>

Despite the disruptions in the second half of year, there have been many events that are worthy of celebration. In September 2019, we welcomed two new assistant professors to our department, **Naja Ferjan Ramírez**, who specializes in first language acquisition, and **Shane Steinert-Threlkeld**, who specializes in computational semantics. In January 2020, we bid farewell to our beloved long-time departmental administrator, **Michael Furr**, and welcomed our new administrator **Monica Cohn**. We are grateful to Mike for his many years of service to the department. In June 2020, we held an online graduation ceremony to celebrate our students' crowning achievements of the 2019-20 academic year. Forty-three students received their BA degrees, many had departmental honors, five were cum laude, seven were magna cum laude, five were summa

cum laude, and three were nominated for Phi Beta Kappa. Twenty-eight students received Master's degrees, and five received PhD degrees. A video of the ceremony can be seen at this link: <https://youtu.be/QB-RyzFwA4M>. Our students are the lifeblood of the department and we are humbled by their academic achievement.



In July, Sharon Hargus became Associate Chair of the Linguistics Department, and Barbara Citko became Chair of the Arts and Sciences College Council. As I write this note, we are beginning the year teaching and learning remotely. While it remains a challenge for our faculty and our students, I have every confidence that they will rise to

the occasion. I will end this note by saying goodbye to phonologist Gašper Beguš, who has left UW for UC Berkeley, where we wish him all the best. We welcome our new undergraduate and graduate students and our two newest faculty, Assistant Professor **Qi Cheng**, who specializes in language deprivation and morpho-syntactic processing, and ASL Lecturer **Dan Mathis**. Both will be featured in future newsletters.



## 2019-20 PhDs

**Nicole Chartier**, *Old Stereotypes “Live Free or Die”: Addressing the Evaluation Problem of non-rhoticity in southeastern New Hampshire* (**Betsy Evans** and **Alicia Beckford Wassink**, supervisors) Her study was partially funded by a 2018-2019 Linguistic Excellence Award.

**Michael Scanlon**, *Stylistic variation in African American Language: examining the social meaning of linguistic features in a Seattle community* (**Alicia Beckford Wassink** supervisor)

**Joshua Crowgey**, *Braiding Language (by Computer): Lushootseed Grammar Engineering* (**Emily M. Bender**, supervisor)

**Molly Fitzmorris**, *Productivity, influence, and evolution: The complex language shift of Modern Ladino* (**Sharon Hargus**, supervisor)

**Kristen Howell**, *Inferring Grammars from Interlinear Glossed Text: Extracting Typological and Lexical Properties for the Automatic Generation of HPSG Grammars* (**Emily M. Bender**, supervisor). Her study was partially funded by an NSF grant (AGGREGATION, PI **Emily Bender**) and a 2019-2020 Linguistic Excellence Award (Linguistic Excellence Awards).



## Congratulations

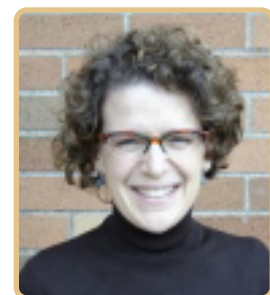
PhD student **Tsudoi Wada** was awarded a 2020-21 Foreign Language Area Studies award for the study of Tsay Keh ([tʰsekʰeh] or [tʰse:kʰene]), an Athabaskan (Dene) language spoken in Tsay Keh, British Columbia, his third year in a row.



Undergraduate **Madeline Bonner** (German and Linguistics double major, Earth Sciences minor) was a 2020 Dean's Medalist

**Kirby Conrod** has been invited to be a plenary speaker at The 57th Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society, May 6-8, 2021

**Emily M. Bender** continues as the Howard and Frances Nostrand Professor (2019-22)



**Naja Ferjan Ramírez** holds a Distinguished Professorship in Language Acquisition and Multilingualism



**Alicia Beckford Wassink** received NSF funding (2019-22) for The social networks of ethnic minority speakers in Washington State, an extension of her current documentation of Pacific Northwest English study <https://artsci.washington.edu/news/2020-08/do-you-speak-northwest>

See also Recent conference activity, Bender and Koller presentation.

## Linguistic Excellence Awards

The Linguistics Department annually funds three one-quarter Linguistic Excellence awards for graduate students nearing completion of their dissertations. Below, 2020-21 awardees Ben Jones, Anna Moroz, and Jiahui Huang describe their projects.



### Ben Jones

The Spatiality of Perceptual Dialectology project uses two tasks from perceptual dialectology methods to collect evaluative judgments of linguistic features. The results of these two tasks are then analyzed through the framework of spatiality, which looks at space through three dimensions: its social construction, its psychological internalization, and its physical manifestation. The goal of this project is to understand the construction of identity through language use that incorporates all three of these dimensions. The underlying motivation is that (most) research in social dialectology does not consider all three equally; one dimension (usually physical space) is omitted.' Ben's supervisor is **Betsy Evans**.

### Anna Moroz

'I am a sociolinguist whose primary interest centers around attitudes and language change in the Pacific Northwest in light of a linguistic phenomenon known as the California Vowel Shift. For my dissertation research, I am focusing on understanding the vowel systems of Southern Oregonians and whether there is a relationship between those vowel systems and orientation towards place or 'rootedness'. The ultimate goal of my research in Southern Oregon is to add to the growing body of research regarding language change in the West and explore applications of rootedness in sociolinguistic research.' Anna's supervisor is **Betsy Evans**. (Photo: intersection of Oregon and California St. in Jacksonville OR)



### Jiahui Huang

This project aims to provide a minimalist approach in decomposing the feature specification of finiteness, a notion widely used in syntactic literature but remains vaguely defined particularly in morphologically impoverished languages like Chinese in which tense and agreement are not overtly marked. One of the key questions is what comprises a finite clause as opposed to a nonfinite clause that lacks these features, and how its reflection can vary across languages. Based on a unique fact called Incompleteness Effect in Chinese, I argue that finiteness is a notion composed of both tense and mood. The obligatory aspect markings for different eventualities are reflections of how the number features of events are valued (parallel to the nominal counterpart). Finite clauses are those environments where their temporal specificity can be determined by number feature specification of the embedded event while nonfinite clauses are those where the number features fail to be independently valued.' Jiahui's supervisor is **Edith Aldridge**.



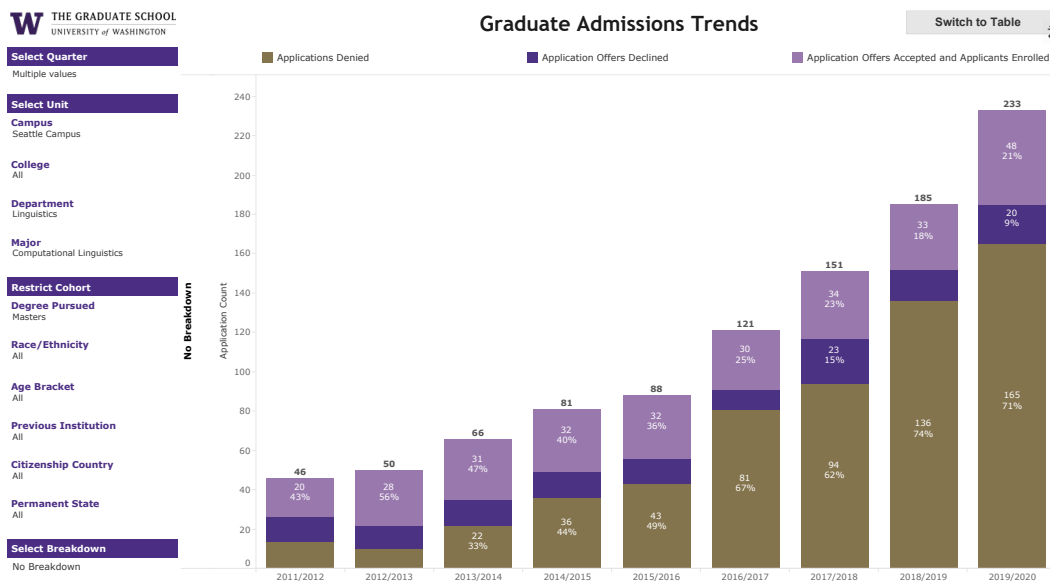
# ASL Update

With the addition of lecturer **Dan Mathis** to the ASL faculty, the number of ASL course offerings will increase. Seven sections of ASL 101 will be taught in Autumn 2020! Sr. Lecturer **Lance Forshay** reports that “Dan has been meeting with the ASL teachers every week throughout the summer to get to know our ASL team. He has contributed a lot already with his expertise in ASL teaching. We are looking for great things coming from Dan for our department.”

Watch for an announcement of an Asian Languages and Literatures colloquium, currently scheduled for November 6, by Dr. Chang Ho Hwang and **Lance Forshay** for a presentation on the History and Development of Korean Sign Language. Dr. Hwang does research on Korean Sign Language and teaches ASL part time at Central Washington University, Sammamish. He taught ASL 102 and 103 at UW in 2019-20.

# Computational Linguistics Update

From Emily Bender: “The computational linguistics/natural language processing industry has continued to grow, leading to increasing demand for people trained in this area. The CLMS program, established in 2005 and well known across the US and beyond, has been well-placed to attract large and increasing numbers of highly qualified applicants and we are excited to provide the training to meet this demand. In light of steadily increasing numbers of applicants, we were able to expand our program faculty from three to four in 2019-2020 when we welcomed Prof. Shane Steinert-Threlkeld.”



## Check out these recent podcasts by Emily M. Bender:

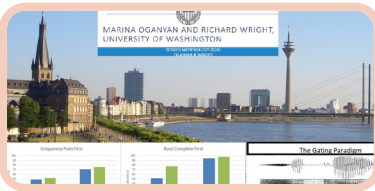
The Radical AI Podcast Episode 16: The Power of Linguistics: Unpacking Natural Language Processing Ethics with Emily Bender, recorded May 2020, released July 2020. [<https://www.radicalai.org/e16-emily-bender>]

This Week in Machine Learning (TWIML) Is Linguistics Missing from NLP Research? w/ Emily M. Bender, May 2020. [video version] [<https://twimlai.com/twiml-talk-376-is-linguistics-missing-from-nlp-research-w-emily-m-bender/>]

NLP Highlights, 106 - Ethical Considerations in NLP Research, Emily Bender, February 2020. [<https://soundcloud.com/nlp-highlights/106-ethical-considerations-in-nlp-research-emily-bender>]

See also Data Statements for NLP: Towards Best Practices (Spring 2020), Featured grants

## Recent conference activity



**Marina Oganyan** and **Richard Wright**, 'The uniqueness point vs. the root in spoken word recognition in Hebrew' at Spoken Morphology 2020, April 15

**Alicia Beckford Wassink**, "Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research in Linguistics", part of the Brown University Leadership Alliance, Virtual Professional Development Program, June 24, 2020.



**Emily M. Bender** and Alexander Koller, 'Climbing towards NLU [Natural Language Understanding]: On Meaning, Form, and Understanding in the Age of Data' at The 58th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (virtually in Seattle), July 7, 2020. Congratulations on winning Best Theme Paper at the conference, the theme being "Taking Stock of Where We've Been and Where We're Going".

**Julia Herschensohn** and Ana Fernández-Dobao, 'A receptive-expressive gap for Spanish-English heritage language and second language bilingual children?' at Linguistic Studies of Romance Languages (virtually in Austin), July 8, 2020.



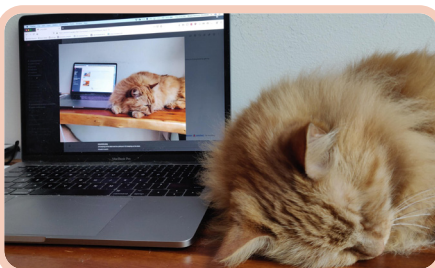
**A comparison of automatic and manual measures of caregiver-infant turn-taking**

Naja Ferjan Ramírez & Patricia K. Kuhl  
University of Washington



**Naja Ferjan Ramírez** and Patricia Kuhl, 'A comparison of automatic and manual measures of caregiver-infant turn-taking' at the International Congress of Infant Studies (virtual), July 6-9

Nur Lan, Emmanuel Chemla, **Shane Steinert-Threlkeld**, 'On the Emergence of Discrete and Compositional Signals' at Association for Computational Linguistics, July 7 2020



Milica Denić, **Shane Steinert-Threlkeld**, Jakub Szymanik, 'Complexity/informativeness tradeoff in the domain of indefinite pronouns' Semantics and Linguistic Theory, August 18 2020 (This photo of Shane's cat illustrates the concept of recursion: JD sleeping on the desk next to a picture of JD sleeping on the desk next to a picture of JD sleeping on the desk (on three consecutive days of ACL).

## Faculty news

### Faculty Profile: Meet Naja Ferjan Ramírez

**Naja Ferjan Ramírez** joined the Linguistics Department faculty in Autumn 2019 where she specializes in first language acquisition, brain imaging and related fields. She directs the Language Development and Processing Lab in Smith Hall.

Naja majored in Neurosciences at Brown University, graduating in 2007. Why Brown? An elite 800-meter runner, she was recruited from the Slovenian national team to run track at Brown. She explained that in Europe it is difficult to be both an academic and an athlete, but going to Brown allowed her to pursue both passions. She admits that she was a “language dork”, not surprising for a native of Slovenia, which borders Austria, Hungary, Croatia and Italy. She remembers family trips to Italy to buy clothes and to Austria for ski trips (her parents were avid skiers) and even grocery shopping. At age 12 she began formal study of English, then German and French.

Naja got hooked on neuroscience after taking her first course in it at Brown. She reports that she had “amazing teachers” and now strives to inspire her current students in the same way. In her 3rd and 4th years at Brown she went deeper into linguistics, and then selected Linguistics for graduate school, attracted by the interdisciplinary approaches of the Center for Research in Language at UCSD. She currently describes her German as “conversational” but it was good enough then to teach German grammar at UCSD for two years, and she in fact won a teaching award in her 3rd year of graduate school. Her background in diverse languages, along with observation of individual differences in language learning abilities, fueled her research interests in L1. Her research at UCSD was in delayed language acquisition, specifically of ASL signers, using multiple methodologies, culminating in her dissertation *Acquiring a first language in adolescence: Behavioral and neuroimaging studies in American Sign Language* (enveloping three published articles).

After graduate school, Naja spent six years at I-LABS (at different times Postdoctoral Fellow, Outreach and Education Specialist and Research Scientist), where she learned about “the baby world” from Pat Kuhl and others. One of the highlights was her participation in a White House Regional Summit on Dual Language Learners (held in Miami June 2016), an effort by the Obama administration to enhance the language experiences of bilingual learners.

Prior to joining Linguistics in Autumn 2019, Naja’s previous teaching experience had been the aforementioned German grammar at UCSD. In her first year at UW she taught four classes that were new to her: LING 200 (Introduction to Linguistics), 441 (Lg Processing and Development), 212 (Infant Brain and Language Development), and 580 (Language Input and the Brain), the last two courses she developed herself. Although most would consider this a challenging teaching assignment, Naja says she had a “great time”, despite having to learn Canvas, supervise TAs for the first time, and adapt to sudden changes in Winter wrought by the pandemic (e.g. creating an online final exam for LING 200). She is excited to share her research and teaching with the rest of the department.





Alicia Wassink, Harriet Joyce Craven, Ethel Craven-Sweet, Jana Jefferson at Black Pioneer Family Annual Picnic

## Historic family takes part in Pacific Northwest English Study

Since PNWE's beginnings in 2007, the general approach has been to include folks in families that have had a longstanding presence in the Northwest. A central goal of the current phase of Alicia Beckford Wassink's research on Pacific Northwest English is to investigate the sociolinguistic implications of the long history of interethnic contact and geographic migration that have shaped Washington state. In August 2019, the Pacific Northwest English study team was invited to a picnic with a family of pioneers. The Craven family's story goes back generations, further than any family included in the research thus far. Their ancestors came to Roslyn, a former coal-camp town, in 1888 as part of a group of over 300 black men. They were promised good wages working in a new mine, but were met with animosity (bricks and rocks) upon entering the town. Strikers were protesting at the mine, and the men learned they'd been brought to work the mines under false pretenses. Roslyn rose to regional importance when, in June 1975, the city council elected the state of Washington's first African American mayor, Will Craven. The former mayor, his sisters and their families have kept up a now decades-old tradition of throwing a picnic each year, celebrating their family's heritage. Across the afternoon, the PNWE study team heard stories about dangerous mining conditions, daring rescues, and generations-old bonds of friendship between black and white families in Roslyn. The team is grateful to the Cravens and Harts for sharing their stories and voices, quite literally, with them. (Oh, and 1 or 2 of them were gifted with a commemorative t-shirt!)





Dr. Kinuhata doing fieldwork. Potato is in the bowl.

## Visiting Scholar Profile: Meet Tomohide Kinuhata

“Hello! I am **Tomohide Kinuhata** (<https://www.cis.fukuoka-u.ac.jp/~tkinuhata/>). I work for Fukuoka University in Japan and am currently a visiting scholar of this department

(until next February). I earned my PhD through a study on the history of Japanese and am now working on the fieldwork of Miyako-Ryukyuan: Ryukyuan is a sister language of Japanese and spoken in the Ryukyu Islands, which are situated on the southwest of the Japan main islands. I very much enjoy the life in Seattle, taking part in some linguistics meetings\* but hope to see you all in the department building during my stay if the restrictions due to COVID-19 are more relaxed!”

\*Dr. Kinuhata gave presentations on Ryukyuan at Semantics Roundtable and Field Reports Spring 2020.

## Featured grants

**Gina-Anne Levow** shares information about two recent (2015-2019) projects which combine computational and descriptive linguistic goals:

### LanguageNet Lexicons

The LanguageNet Lexicons are a publicly available, massively multilingual online lexical resource, spanning more than 1800 languages. The resource was created to support rapid development of computational tools, such as machine translation or information extraction, for low-resource languages. The LanguageNet lexicons encompass over 80 million translation pairs, mined semi-automatically from a wide range of online sources. The translation pairs are linked with additional information such as lemma, part of speech, pronunciation (both manually and automatically derived), transliteration, data source, and domain. The resource is available from:

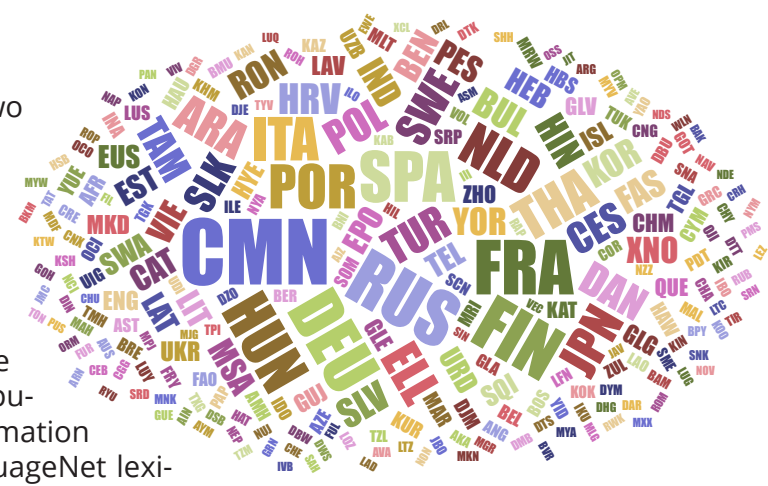
<http://uakari.ling.washington.edu/language-net/available/>

This work was supported by the DARPA LORELEI Program (Low Resource Languages for Emerging Incidents). Gina-Anne Levow, Leanne Rolston (UW Linguistics), Katrin Kirchhoff (Amazon), and Mark Hasegawa-Johnson (UIUC) contributed to this work.

### ASR24

The ASR24 system builds an Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) system to transcribe speech from a previously unseen language in less than 24 hours. The system requires only a small corpus of text in the new language and a pronunciation model that can be readily created from a typical Wikipedia page for the language. ASR24 leverages a pre-trained acoustic model and uses the corpus and pronunciation model to rapidly adapt to the new language. The system has been successfully applied to Arabic, Assam, Kinyarwanda, Russian, Sinhalese, Swahili, Tagalog, Tamil, Zulu, Ilocano, and Odia. The software is available at: <https://github.com/uiuc-sst/asr24>

This work was supported by the DARPA LORELEI Program (Low Resource Languages for Emerging Incidents). Gina-Anne Levow, Leanne Rolston, Erica Gardner, Avijit Vajpayee (of UW Linguistics at the time of this work) and Mark Hasegawa-Johnson and Camille Gousosune (of UIUC) contributed to this work.



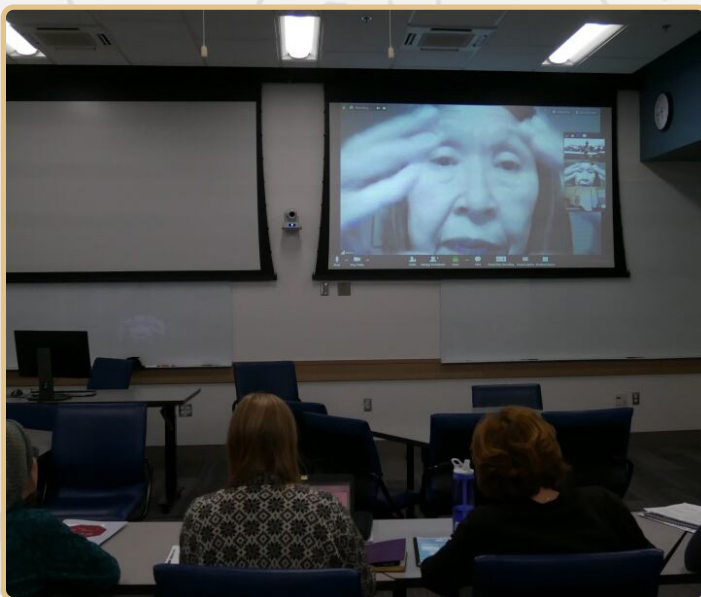
## Featured Language: Inuktitut

**Agatha Downey** received a Foreign Language Area Studies scholarship to study Inuktitut during 2019-20. Here is her description of the experience:

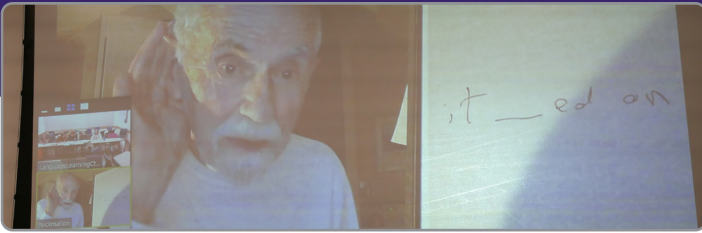
"This past year, I studied Inuktitut (also called Inuktut): a dialect of Inuit spoken mainly around Baffin Island, in northern Nunavut. My studies throughout the year were sponsored by the Jackson School of International Studies' offering of the federal Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship. UW is lucky to be the only school in the continental US to offer Inuktitut language classes, which are all conducted via Zoom- a practice that started before Covid-19, due to the instructors' variable residency in Iqaluit and Victoria, B.C. Alexina Kublu and Mick Mallon are a husband and wife pair who have been at the forefront of teaching the Inuit language in Canada for decades. While Mick developed most of UW's course program, Kublu has taken leadership of teaching in recent years. As a native speaker, Kublu's language and cultural knowledge have been invaluable for moving the program forward (I among several other students will be continuing with the "one room schoolhouse" 300-level course series this year).



Linguistically, Inuktitut is a prototypical example of a "polysynthetic" language, with many argument relations being expressed through long chains of derivational affixes (or "chunks", as Mick and Kublu refer to them) and capped off by a single inflectional ending. In fact, these constitute most Inuktitut utterances. Perhaps most difficult for English speakers is an extremely complex system of morphophonemics, which make the boundaries between morphemes extremely difficult to discern for an outsider. Mick and Kublu tend to eschew formal linguistic terms in favor of their own more pedagogically-friendly terms for these processes ("parachuters" and "self-decapitators" being among the more eccentric). Arguably, the phonemic inventory of Inuktitut is bare-bones in comparison to its morphology. The vowels are /i, a, u/, and although they are often listed as separate in sound tables, I can't find any minimal pairs for [k~ç~ŋ] or [q~ɸ~N]. Allophones are everywhere!



In all, the greatest part of the Inuktitut program at UW has to be the enthusiastic, personal, and extremely unique touch that Mick and Kublu have put on the class. The textbook, shared with students as an in-progress Word file, is filled with one-of-a-kind learning conventions, such as Inuktitut always being written in Comic Sans, English in Times New Roman, and unrelated asides or stories in Papyrus font. In addition, a strict color-coding system dominates the book: first-person is blue, second is green, third is orange, and fourth is red and/or pink. Mick has been known to not want to write an example on the board if he can't find the proper color marker. In a time when so much has changed, I'm looking forward to my regularly-scheduled Zoom calls with Kublu this Fall."



	LABIAL	ALVEOLAR	Pal	Vel	UVULA	STATEMENT V.E.	QUESTION V.E.
VOICELESS STOP CONTIN.	p	t	k	q		-juqa -juqik -juqut	1st PERSON -vutqa? -vutik? -vutut?
VOICED STOP CONTIN.	[b]	l	j	g	r	-juttt -jusk -jusc	2nd PERSON -vit? -visik? -visit?
NASAL	m	n	ŋ	ɣ		-uqa	3rd PERSON -va?

## Language puzzle:

Can you figure out the free translation of this four-word Inuktitut sentence from the morpheme glosses provided? (*The answer can be found at the bottom of this page.*)

**panikpit ilinniaqtitsijina nanurmit nirijaulauqpa?**

**panik-pit**

**ilit-niaq-titsi-ji-ŋa**

**nanuq-mit**

**niri-jaq-lauq-pa?**

**daughter-ERG.2POSS**

**learn-FUT-make.do-AG-ABS.4POSS**

**bear-INS**

**eat-PASS-PST-Q3SBJ**

## Where are they now?

Alumna **Laura Panfili** (PhD 2018) has been working for the past two years as a Language Data Researcher at Amazon, where she's part of the Alexa Intelligent Decisions organization. Her team works on making Alexa more conversational in various ways, like resolving anaphors and asking for clarification on acoustically noisy requests. It's a role that draws on the skills she learned in the UW Linguistics department, including experimental design, statistics, scripting, and pragmatics. Laura feels very fortunate to work on a team of language enthusiasts, most of whom also have a linguistics background (including two other UW Linguistics alumnae, Alli Germain and Esther Le Grézause!) and enjoys the research feel of the job and the good work-life balance. Laura's advice for current students is to squeeze in as many extra skills as your advisor lets you – take a programming class, join lab groups, work with people in other departments, etc. She also recommends what another linggrad advised her early on: treat grad school like a job; keep regular hours and keep work separate from things like personal email and social media. Finally, explore your options not just in academia but also in industry and elsewhere!



Laura working from home with Alexa and two plants that spent some good years in GUG 407.

## Want more UW Linguistics? Questions?

Web: <https://linguistics.washington.edu/>

Phone: (206) 543-2046

E-mail: [linguw@uw.edu](mailto:linguw@uw.edu)

Newsletter feedback or suggestions should be sent to **Sharon Hargus** ([sharon@uw.edu](mailto:sharon@uw.edu)).

Language puzzle answer:

"Was your daughter's teacher eaten by a bear?"