

Interdisciplinary Major: Applied Cognitive Linguistics

Alternate Titles:

Cognitive Science and Applied Linguistics

Applied Psycholinguistics

Cognitive and Comparative Linguistics

(Psychology, Modern Languages, Child Study/Human Development)

Your Full Name

Class of XXXX

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DESCRIPTION

Throughout high school, that one relentlessly pervasive question always worms its way into conversations about college: *are you more of a math-and-science person or a language-and-history person?* It is a well-intentioned question, and a valuable one when its answer comes easily. It is also a distinctly myopic and un-Tufts question. I never knew quite how to answer. What I did know was that I'd never seen myself as a math person—while I scored highest in math on my SAT, it had always been my least favorite class. Likewise, history as it was taught in middle and high school revolved around so much rote memorization that I was hard-pressed to make it feel any less dry than math. It was my science and language classes that made me excited to take the train to school every morning because to me they were the *living* subjects. The power to communicate and how it evolves, the power to effect change in the minds of people, to reflect and embrace the sounds and sentiments of the cultures of the world, and the ability to measure, qualify, and build upon that living foundation and explore not what we already know about the world but what we don't, and in turn what we don't yet understand about ourselves!—that I found endlessly fascinating. So I would answer the question that I was more a language-and-science person. Within the field of linguistics I found that fusion.

Prior to matriculating at Tufts, I spent several summers living with a family in Spain, immersed in their language and culture, becoming increasingly fascinated by issues like dialects as stigmatizing sociological markers and the evolution of regional foreign phonology. I segued this experiential learning into my academic journey at Tufts, enrolling in courses like *Advanced Spanish Grammar*, *Romance Linguistics*, *Logic*, *Phonological Theory*, *Syntactic Theory*, *Children and Mass Media*, and others. Last summer I was invited to collaborate with Tufts Professor Dr. Ariel Goldberg as part of his Psycholinguistics Lab to explore the phonotactics of American Sign Language; this further sparked my fascination with the vast possibilities of linguistics research and its implications for language definition and discovery, second language acquisition, language learning tools, and language-related policy making. Though linguistics is often regarded as a subset of foreign language studies, or philosophy as it is at Tufts, I appreciated and am awed by its requiring a much more interdisciplinary lens for investigation. I am interested in how it explores the unconscious knowledge humans have about language, how children acquire language, language structure in general and in particular, and how language influences the way we interact with each other and view the world. It takes insight, creativity, understanding of human nature, and most of all an appreciation for difference—a skillset completely independent from one's capacity to translate words.

While Tufts's Linguistics minor allows for a taste of this in six courses, with interests in the cognitive side of *applied* linguistics, I have questions that extend to identifying and finding solutions to real-life problems concerned with how spoken and written language interacts with shaping thought. I don't just want to know how language works; I want to leverage how it makes us think. I'm interested in increasing the understanding of the role language plays in human affairs and educating those responsible for making language-related decisions in the classroom, workplace, theatre, lab, or court of law. (Look no further than social media to witness the formative effect of words on the mind more now than ever, with political language arousing and dividing, societal groups delineating what language is whose to use, terminology coming into existence at an unprecedentedly rapid rate, and the roots of diversity threatened as languages and by extension their cultures are being attacked, appropriated, and assimilated, meeting the growing domestic and international demand for second-language acquisition and psycholinguistics specialists.) The subject matter is fantastically interdisciplinary, and I plan to approach it by merging my passions in Psychology, Modern Languages/Romance Studies, and Child Study/Human Development into a combined major directly and holistically addressing Applied Cognitive Linguistics (ACL).

My plan is to progress from pure cognitive psychology, linguistics, and Romance Language classes (in Spanish and Italian so far) toward more significantly cross-curricular study (for example, contrasting the Reed-Kellogg and bracketing maps used in *Advanced Spanish Grammar* with the Chomskian generative grammar trees used in psychology/philosophy hybrid class *Syntactic Theory*—basically, which model of

sentence diagramming best lends itself to which language and why). Time permitting, I'd very much like to learn several additional languages while here, even if just the fundamentals to study the way they work. But at the core of my passion, more than my love for *languages* (with the final -s) is my love for *language* and the cognitive processes behind it, and in an applied pursuit, studying theory only goes so far. That's why I want to supplement my comparative linguistics and scientific foundations with courses in child study and human development to serve as the link between them (on the developmental front, addressing my questions about second language acquisition, bilingualism, how we process new words, etc. in practical research) and the bridge to applying them. CSHD classes such as *Bilingual Children in the US* and *Development of Thought and Language* will equip me with the tools to analyze the impact of language on new audiences and to effectively teach not just foreign languages but also how to use language productively, preparing for postgraduate possibilities including speech pathology or clinical psychology, cross-cultural marketing and media, or consulting on language in professions such as law or medicine.

I believe that while my proposed interdisciplinary major does not currently exist as a mainstream concentration at Tufts, we do have the courses and resources that will enable me to fulfill my academic goals. In fact, when comparing analogous programs at other universities, I believe this independently designed course of study in ACL at Tufts easily parallels those offered at other universities. For example, an Applied Linguistics major at Washington University in St. Louis delineates three semesters of foreign language, a course each in phonology and sociolinguistics, two electives on language acquisition, and at least one course in cognitive psychology of language (education.wustl.edu). To major in Applied Linguistics and Multilingualism at UC Santa Cruz demands two introductory linguistics courses, a course each on phonology and syntactic theory, a study in second language acquisition, four electives in the area of educational bilingualism, psycholinguistics, child psychology, and/or language and culture, and a demonstrable proficiency in a foreign language (language.ucsc.edu). Northeastern University promotes a BS in Linguistics and Psychology, an interdisciplinary degree blending five pure linguistics courses with three in sociolinguistics, five in psychology, a statistics course for behavioral sciences, a class on developmental psychology and one on perception (catalog.northeastern.edu). I have taken these data into consideration when crafting my own proposed course plan; integrating a balance of humanities-based courses such as *Language and Culture* (PSY), *Spanish in the Community* (ML/RS), and *Children and Mass Media* (CSHD), alongside more empirical ones including *Phonological Theory* and *Biological Foundations of Language* (PSY), *Linguistic Approaches to Second Language Acquisition* (ML/RS), and *Reading, Dyslexia, and the Brain* (CSHD), I've worked to shape the ACL major to offer me the roundest and richest possible exposure to psychology that Tufts can provide through a philological lens.

The majority of the linguistics classes at Tufts, as well as many in human development, fall under the umbrella of the Psychology Department, though only some of the development courses and none of the linguistics courses count toward a major in Psychology. Conversely, while the Cognitive and Brain Sciences track does give the option to include linguistics, it does not strongly integrate the foreign language and child/human development foci that are important to me. By the conventional model, the only way I could achieve such breadth in the applied linguistics area I want to study is by completing a double major in Cognitive and Brain Sciences and Spanish—as Spanish is most integral foreign language to my studies and where I would take the most ML/RS classes but as of now is not offered as a minor to A&S students—as well as a double minor in Linguistics and CSHD. That comes to a total of 33 courses by conservative estimate, i.e. not double-counting, including many required courses less pertinent to my focus and leaving me little time to explore other elective areas of interest (such as Film and Media or Judaic Studies, for example), which I really would love to do. An interdisciplinary major not only would be more logistically pragmatic, but having three advisors with deep knowledge in each of their academic fields and interdisciplinary lenses across these fields would be of extraordinary value to my exploring the intersections across languages, psychology and child and human development. Weaving the three together, allowing me the same breadth but also the depth in applied linguistics and its facets, would be the consummate academic option for me at Tufts and one of which I would be very grateful to take advantage.

APPLICABLE COURSES

The spreadsheet on the next page details courses that can be applied to the ACL major. Each block, coded by color, includes several courses within the given discipline (Child Study/Human Development, Modern Languages/Romance Studies, Psychology). Shaded courses (e.g. CSHD167) I have already taken.

To best illustrate interdisciplinary crossover, I have included the four left columns, which indicate double- or triple-counting as defined by SIS (I do not intend to leverage this crossover to take fewer classes for more credits; this is simply to underscore the crosscurricular relationships throughout the subject matter). There is also a column for crossover with Linguistics (SIS LING classification), though because it exists at Tufts more as a subset than as a concrete department, I am not considering it one of my three major disciplines.

This chart includes significantly more courses than I ultimately will take to fulfill the ACL major (in fact, more than I even could take before graduating). Due to the largely unpredictable nature of what will be offered when (if at all), it seemed a more responsible decision to develop a wider array of options, rather than bank on being able to take a specific class senior year just to learn it has closed or been deferred. This way I can be sure to optimize my time taking fascinating courses that contribute to the ACL focus, but at the same time this flexibility will allow me to take discrete electives without worrying I will be unable to complete my major requirements on time. If the CIS committee would prefer to see a semester-by-semester course plan, I would gladly design one, but it felt arbitrary to guess what would be offered years in advance.

It is also worth noting that yes, I already have taken ten of the courses listed on the next page. It is this combination of courses that has shaped my interest in this field of study; by no means do I want to be finished now. As mentioned earlier, synthesizing my own major will be a great help in allowing me to study additional things (whereas if I were pursuing PSY, ML/RS, CSHD, and LING independently I would have no time to explore beyond), but nonetheless I plan to take 5-10 more ACL courses before graduating. I have taken five courses each semester for the past three semesters and intend to continue with a similar course load, taking classes I find exciting.

CSHD	LING	PSY	CSHD	ML/RS
CSHD167 Children and Mass Media				
CSHD177 Bilingual Studies				
CSHD155 Young Child's Development of Language				
CSHD195 Developmental Disorders in Language and Reading				
CSHD155 Development of Language				
CSHD51 Intellectual Development of Young Children				
ML/RS				
SPN123 Adv Spanish Grammar / Syntactic Theory				
ML96 Romance Linguistics				
SPN31 Latin American Literature				
ITAL0001 Elementary Italian				
SPN191 Redefining Spain in Words and Images				
ML114 Linguistic Approaches to Second Language Acquisition				
SPN146 Spanish in the Community				
PSY				
LING64 Intro Linguistics				
LING155 Phonological Theory				
LING112 Syntactic Theory				
LING33 Logic				
PSY12 Abnormal Psychology				
PSY31 Statistics for Behavioral Sciences				
PSY11 Developmental Psychology				
PSY144 Memory and Retention				
PSY180 Music, Language, and the Brain				
PSY32 Experimental Psychology				
LING137 Language and Culture				
LING149 Psychology of Language				
LING153 Biological Foundations of Language				

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