University Council for General and Applied Linguistics (UCGAL) Census 2021

Background

In the spring of 2021, the committee of UCGAL decided that our discipline, Linguistics, was suffering from the wider problems in the Arts, Humanities and (less so) the Social Sciences, which is the intersection at which Linguistics sits. These problems were particularly harsh for the non-traditional discipline which is a relative newcomer to the UK academy, compared with English, History etc. We decided to attempt to carry out a census of academics identifying as linguists as the baseline against which we could 'measure' future developments in the field. Part of the aim was to discover to what extent Linguistics is visible and what our colleagues have been doing to promote it, but we also wanted to know how precarious their situation is and where they can be found, both geographically and within institutions of HE. The questions asked can be found in appendix A.

Whilst this survey was advertised widely through academic networks and social media, it could not be comprehensive and is therefore a snapshot of the responses from a self-selecting sample willing to spend a little time on answering our questions. Nevertheless, we were very pleased that we received so many responses which gives our findings some credibility. This report summarises those findings, with the caveat that more data would probably alter some of them.

The commentary below is written for UCGAL and wider communities of linguists, including our respondents. We probably need a summary document/press release version for wider dissemination. The parts in italic (red) are interpretative rather than observational (though there is some overlap between these as always!)

How many linguists are there?

We had 434 responses from people identifying as linguists:

> 245 permanent contract
> 87 PGRs
> 53 fixed-term contract
> 25 hourly paid (8 freelance; 15 PGR, 2 retired)
> 19 retired
> 5 'other' (Hon Fellows etc)

The proportions here may not be fully representative as precarious staff may not be in the networks to hear about the survey – or be working too many jobs to have time for such things. If these proportions were accurate, the picture is that 56% of staff in Linguistics are permanent whilst a mixture of different precarious contracts make up 18% of the rest (excluding retired and honorary roles).

What are their main roles?

> 229 teaching/research/admin
> 74 F/T student
> 64 mainly research
> 35 mainly teaching
> 9 mainly admin/management
> 23 'other' (including retired/emeritus; supervision; mentoring; P/T teaching)

Just over half of our respondents (53%) are on standard contracts where they are expected to divide their time between teaching, research and admin. Another 15% are employed for research only whilst 8% are employed for teaching alone.

We cannot draw any particular conclusions from the figures on contract type or roles, except to say that a repeat of this survey would help us establish trends in the situation and if there is comparative data for other disciplines, that would also be enlightening.

Where are linguists to be found in the country?

Distribution of Participants by Region
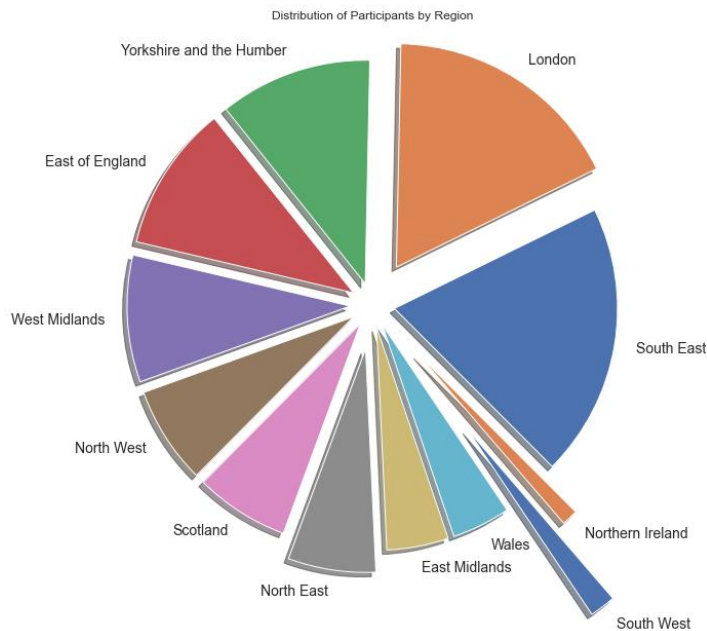
There is perhaps no surprise here, given population density in London and the South East, but it is interesting that if you add Yorkshire into these figures, these three regions account for half of all linguists responding to the survey.

Where can linguists be found in the Academy?

The responses were as varied as the respondents – 253 in total. However, there was some repetition and slight variation (e.g. in spelling or variants such as *and/&*) and there were different 'levels' of hierarchy mentioned (from *Faculty* and *School* to *Department* and *Division* as well as *Institute* and *Centre*). Since these labels mean different things in different institutions, we edited them out and grouped together apparently identical subject labels, keeping separate those which listed similar topics (e.g. *English Language* and *Linguistics*) but in different orders. The resulting list remains long, at 115 different places where linguists can be found working (see Appendix B).

Whilst it is not, in itself, a problem - indeed it is a strength - that linguists work in the context of 'other' disciplines, such as other Social Sciences, Humanities, Education and even STEM disciplines, this exacerbates the potential for invisibility of a discipline which is relatively young (not even 100 years old in its modern form) and not well-known by many both inside and outside the academy.

A summary of observations on these 115 labels:

> 28 containing *Linguistics*;
> 15 containing *Languages* without separately specifying *Linguistics*;
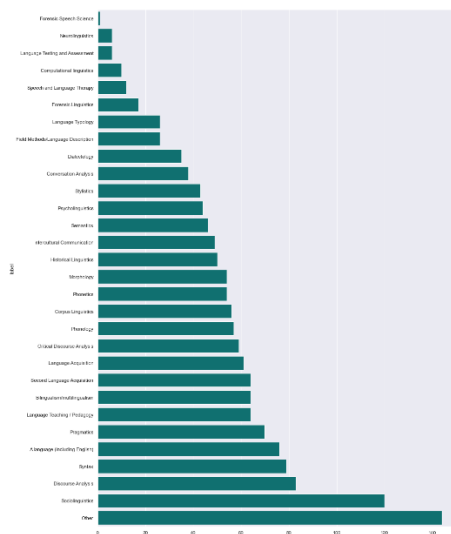> 11 containing *Languages* and *Linguistics* separately;

7 containing 'Science' with *Linguistic / Language / Communication / Hearing* (ignoring *Social Science*);
7 containing *English Language*;
6 containing *English* not followed by *Language*
34 containing none of: *Linguistics*; *Language(s)*; *Communication*; [name of language].

Thus, we see that the vast majority of places where linguists work in UK universities do not mention the word *Linguistics* at all. This may be in the (mistaken) assumption that no 18-year-old would be likely to want to study something that they don't already know about. It may be that the marketing people in Universities think that *English Language* will be more attractive to international students. Whatever the reason, the problem is that there is a lot of ambiguity in words like *Language(s)* in such situations – are these traditional modern (or historical) language teams who teach the language itself (often together with literature and socio-cultural context) but whose approach to their teaching and research is not linguistic? There are, of course, both kinds of linguist to be found in Modern Languages and Classics departments, but the lack of clarity about what is being taught (until you get into curricula details) means that Linguistics is never the default assumption. Likewise with *English* departments (incidentally the biggest group here), where the default assumption will be that these teach primarily literature, and sometimes cultural studies or creative writing, but unless it is specified, English Language is not prominent. A similar problem besets the word *Communication* which is used to refer to a range of academic pursuits, not all of them linguistic. These include computational, business and media applications of the word.

This commentary is not a plea for uniformity, nor for the superiority of Linguistics over other disiciplines, but a recognition that the core discipline which linguists recognise often goes unnoticed by both the public and management of HE institutions. It is also one part of the argument for why we need to promote Linguistics as a discipline and make clear that English, French, German etc. provide the material/data which that discipline studies.

What do linguists teach?
We asked what the main sub-fields were that our respondents taught, and the result was predictably that our list did not seem to fit the way that they saw their teaching, meaning that 'other' was the most popular response:

After 'other', the main teaching specialisms were Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, Teaching of a language (is that linguistics?) and Pragmatics. *It is perhaps significant for UCGAL that Sociolinguistics has no national organisation bringing such linguists together, though it does have a regular conference (UKLVC). This affects our membership and could be addressed through that conference mechanism perhaps? Likewise with Pragmatics.*

What topics are included in the 'other' category?

Some of the topics provided by respondents are really no more than more specific or differently worded versions of the main sub-fields of Linguistics in our list (e.g. Language Testing and Assessment), but many of them simply demonstrate how broad the field is and how our respondents perceive their sub-field, whilst identifying as 'linguist' by filling in the survey in the first place.

The most common of these other categories were:
- Statistics and research methods
- Cognitive Linguistics
- Translation and Interpreting
- Systemic Functional Linguistics
- Research and Teaching methods in Language Learning and Teaching

You can see the individual responses in Appendix C.

It could be concluded from this exercise that linguists are wonderfully diverse in their interests and determined to promote their particular sub-field within the discipline as a whole. This is laudable and necessary, but we also need to try and bring them together under the Linguistics banner if we're to counter the increasingly existential threat against our field.

What research fields do linguists work in?

Whilst there were a small number of respondents who said they were not on contracts requiring research, and one forlorn response of 'I am not allowed to do research', most respondents did fill in this field, though it turns out that the instruction to use keywords proved difficult for many of them! Here is a word cloud of the responses (see Appendix D for responses) which demonstrates the issue of the breadth of the discipline rather well:

What outreach/public understanding of Linguistics are linguists involved in?

124 of the respondents had something to contribute here (see Appendix E for details). The kinds of activities can be summarised as follows:

- Language conferences/study days for teachers and projects promoting linguistic knowledge in schools
- Media, social media appearances (Conversation etc.), blogs, podcasts, tiktok, broadcasting, popular publications (books and magazines), comedy and comics.
- Public promotion of linguistics online and in person (festivals, exhibitions, Collaborative art project Museum exhibit and other activities)
- Workshops, CPD, webinars and other training for interpreters, teachers and others (e.g., legal advisors, police, asylum assessors)
- Devising materials for languages A-levels, primary language curriculum etc.
- Membership of committees and groups of academics promoting linguistics

This much-compressed list undersells the amount, variety and ingenuity which is evident in the full list of activities. It is both hugely impressive and also somewhat chastening to see the amount of energy going into promoting our discipline, often with complete commitment, sometimes as research itself, but frequently an additional burden which is not listed in the teaching/research/admin workload of the majority of our respondents.

What other ideas do respondents have for promoting Linguistics?

The following is a summary of the ideas – many of which were repeated (see Appendix F for details):

- Celebrity champions (Stephen Fry, Michael Rosen, David Crystal)
- Improve UCGAL website, links to organisations and logo. Be more proactive in our public promotion and lobbying of policy-makers etc.
- Better links with A-level students; outreach to schools in general; attempts to reach students not studying language for A-level; Demystify language and linguistics so that it's relevance to society is clear (get away from fronted adverbials in primary school!); Attempt to influence the visibility of English Language in school curriculum
- Benchmark statements for Language and Linguistics – need clarity
- Make connections with fields where our research can be useful
- Promote language pedagogy (and thus linguistics) in MFL u/g courses
- Emphasise the breadth of linguistics and its interdisciplinarity
- Include more linguists (of other languages) on REF panel
- UK still biggest exporter of ELT pedagogy and materials – need to connect better with 'consumer' countries
- More links between UCGAL and other academic organisations (e.g. BALEAP)
- Mailing list for all linguists nationwide for updates and events/activities
- Replicate/repeat the pop-up world of languages / set up a museum of language (Royal Society funding?)
- Events and/or a journal bringing sub-fields of linguistics together
- Encourage and support interdisciplinarity in research and teaching
- Guidance to the journals in our field for ECRs
- Increase the visibility of researchers working on languages other than English
- Better integration of language and literature in Universities in England

- Explore and promote the range of careers open to linguists.
- UCGAL – more organised lobbying of Universities threatening language/linguistics; support for ECRs and fighting precarity
- A register of freelance linguists undertaking contract research
- More sharing/exchange of teaching tips/materials between institutions
- More collaborative projects intra- and inter-disciplinary

Particular statements which stood out:

- We can't do better than to follow the Jo Cox maxim: we have more in common than that which divides us.
- Talking to anybody anywhere about linguistics.

Also, there were comments about the UCGAL list of sub-fields which clearly didn't include everything. Language teaching and assessment and History of Linguistics were mentioned specifically.

One respondent said that BAAL is already quite effective at this. *We need to talk about UCGAL's role in not duplicating but widening the activity promoting Linguistics.*

One response to this is – how? When everyone is already full-occupied with their daily workloads. However, it is vital that we take some steps of this kind to prevent the existential threat that current government (and management) strategies are producing.

What unusual or interesting jobs have linguistic students gone on to?

We asked for unusual jobs, because we thought it might be a good resource to demonstrate to potential students that studying linguistics is not a limiting career move. Perhaps we should have explained a little more clearly as there were a number of respondents upset by the question, sometimes because they didn't like the use of the possessive (your graduates), sometimes because it was a compulsory question, sometimes because there was a typo in the question, but also because they didn't like the assumptions that 'unusual' implied. Here's the most extensive response of that kind:

I have a lot of difficulty answering this question, because it is not only subjective, but it seems to necessarily rely on some of the stereotypes about what ling graduates do. For example, I don't think IT or engineering is that unusual of a job for a linguist to go onto do, but many people in this country do. So would IT count for this question? What about political language advocacy? What about speech lang path? I have my own guesses for whether some of these might count, but it probably varies wildly across our field. I think a multiple choice question would serve a lot better, if you're trying to use this data to show just how broad of a career base linguist UGs can go on to do.   (also just an fyi, unusual is missing a u!)

Perhaps, on reflection, this was an unnecessary and ill-thought-out addition to a factual survey, but we thought it could be useful as an addition to the list of careers that we all know linguists tend to take up. Certainly, being able to encourage students to take Linguistics at degree level should involve some kind of information on future directions.

Here is a word cloud of the responses, excluding the most frequent function words (the, on, for, of, in, at) which skewed the first attempt:

Appendix G contains the full list of responses and criticisms for those interested.

What organisations (UK and international) do linguists belong to?

- AATSEEL (American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages)
- **AFLS (Association for French Language Studies)**
- AGS (Association for German Studies in Great Britain and Ireland)
- AHGBI (Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland) **(2)**
- AILA (International Association of Applied Linguistics)
- Arabic Linguistics Forum
- Association for Language Learning
- **BAAL (British Association for Applied Linguistics)**
- **British Association of Academic Phoneticians (BAAP)**
- BALEAP (British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes) **(5)**
- BAS (British Aphasiology Society)
- **British Association for Clinical Linguists (BACL)**
- BASEES (British Association for Slavonic & East European Studies) **(2)**
- BATJ (The British Association for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language)
- British Academy
- CALICO (Computer-Assisted Language Instruction Consortium)
- CIOL (Chartered Institute of Linguists) **(3)**
- DiscourseNet **(3)**
- EPS (Experimental Psychology Society)
- EuroCALL (European Association of Computer Assisted Language Learning)
- **Henry Sweet Society**
- **Forum for Germanic Language Studies**
- IAFL (International Association of Forensic Linguists)

- IALIC (International Association for Languages and Intercultural Communication)
- IALS (International Association of Literary Semantics) **(4)**
- IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language)
- ICAME (International Computer Archive of Modern and Medieval English)
- IGALA (International Gender and Language Association) **(3)**
- IGEL (The International Society for the Empirical Study of Literature and Media)
- IPA (International Phonetic Association) **(2)**
- IPRA (International Pragmatics Association)
- ISLE (International Society for the Linguistics of English)
- ITI (Institute of Translation and Interpreting) **(2)**
- **LAGB (Linguistics Association of Great Britain)**
- LESLLA (Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults)
- None **(2)**
- **PALA (Poetics and Linguistics Association)**
- **Philological Society**
- RaAM (Researching and Applying Metaphor)
- RCSLT (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists)
- SIS (Society for Italian Studies)
- **University Council of Modern Languages (UCML)**
- UKALTA (UK Association for Language Testing and Assessment) **(4)**
- **UK Cognitive Linguistics Association**
- ULAB (Undergraduate Linguistics Association of Britain) **(2)**

This list is for UCGAL internal use and the highlighted items are those already represented on UCGAL. We may wish to discuss which of the others might also have a case for being represented on the committee.

Conclusions

- Linguistics is extremely wide-ranging, interdisciplinary and varied. This is both a strength and a possible weakness for its identity/survival as a discipline. Linguistics academics answering this survey both identify with the broad field and want to promote their sub-fields. This should not be contradictory. Teaching and research across the discipline reflects this variety and dynamism.
- Linguists are concentrated more in the SE and London than elsewhere, though they are present throughout the UK.
- The visibility of Linguistics in Universities is hampered by the way in which structures (Schools, Faculties, Departments) are named and the lack of agreement about the referent of subject labels.
- There is a recognition that we need to promote our discipline – and many ideas of how to do so, including many already underway.
- Linguists are associated with a wide range of national and international organisations, only some of which are currently represented on UCGAL committee. We need to discuss UCGAL's role amongst this rich network of societies and how best to use our limited resources.
- Graduates in Linguistics have as wide a range of destinations as Arts Humanities or Social Science graduates. We need to find the best way to promote Linguistics as a first step in many careers.

Lesley Jeffries, Chair of UCGAL, November 2022