

BRIGHTEN: An exploration of where the linguists are working
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Career Linguist

Thinking about careers can tend to be quite linear. Such thinking would lead one to conclude that if one studied linguistics, one ought to be doing something recognizeably “linguistic” as part of one’s subsequent professional expression of that training. I tend to approach the question instead in terms of the kinds of challenges a linguist might be drawn to and then ask: which of her linguistic skills and training does she bring to this work? Often, these are the things that make her uniquely successful!

In some fields, linguistic training is known and recognized as valuable. However, in most cases we linguists will need to more actively cultivate opportunities for using our skills. But in just about any work that we do, we will likely find ways to express things like cross-cultural awareness, our ability to abstract away from understanding and misunderstanding, and to apply an empirical orientation to understanding human behavior. Thus, one of my answers to “what can you do with a degree in linguistics?” is BRIGHTEN! This works to gently encourage optimism and serve as a command to gloomy would-be nay-sayers who only want to focus only on the challenges, difficulties, and anxieties of the job search process “hey, the future is BRIGHT!” but the acronym also serves as a handy “world of work” educational tool. **BRIGHTEN stands for: Business, Research, Innovation/Industry, Government, Healthcare, Technology, Education/Entrepreneurship, and Non-Profits.** These are some of the areas in which the linguists I know have found meaningful professional expression of their skills and training. In other words: it’s where the linguists are working!

How to use this resource

I offer this discussion because I have found that it is often very useful for a person beginning a job search to hear about the range of ways that linguists have found professional expression of their training. The job that might be the best fit for you may well not appear here because it does not yet exist because you have yet to create it, but to begin forging any new path, it is always good to have a good sense for roads which currently exist and the lay of the land. So, think of this resource as a map of the world of work.

BRIGHTEN is designed as a way to begin an exploration of the world of work. The categories which follow are designed to organize and guide inquiry, they are not mutually exclusive, nor are they necessarily comparable in terms of level or scope (for example “Business” is quite a big category, within which “Entrepreneurship” may or may not be wholly contained – many entrepreneurs have no interest at all in the business world, and work exclusively with non-profits and other mission-driven organizations). Neither is this list in any way exhaustive (It would be nigh-on impossible to capture all of the ways that awareness of spoken, written and computer-mediated communication is valued and valuable in professional settings – there are myriad untold stories of linguists at work), but I hope this acronym can invite curiosity, and start

more conversations about work, something which I hope will continue for the rest of your working lives!

Specifically, this resource helps you accomplish steps two and three of this five-part plan for beginning a job search as a linguist:

1. Become more aware of the skills cultivated by linguistics and how these might be applied to work and to your job search
2. **Learn about yourself through written description of skills and abilities of actual jobs held by actual linguists**
3. **Recognize and appreciate some of the differences between your own particular areas of interest and focus (even among a group of linguists, you will hear about different skills and abilities that are particularly valued, highlighted, and called into focus)**
4. Bring analytical awareness of language to the stories that you tell about yourself – enacting a critical deictic shift: from thinking and talking in terms of why you want the job to thinking and talking about why THEY need YOU
5. Cultivate a practice of talking about yourself – we will call this “professional self-presentation”- focusing on the WHY (WHY your approach uniquely valuable)

As you read, you may notice that you are drawn to read more closely about some jobs and that you were skimming through others. Let this information be navigationally informative. Which are the kinds of work that you found you wanted to know more about? How can you begin researching these?

Business (B)

Linguists who work in “business” can work in such capacities as strategy (including strategic communication or brand strategy), change management, training, or human resources. Linguists also work in PR, marketing, branding and naming agencies, the last of whom tend to be very aware of linguists and may even recruit specifically for skills and training in phonology, semantics, syntax and morphology. Catchword Naming (www.catch-word.com) - a firm that specializes in corporate names, brand names, taglines and slogans – says of the work they do: “A deep understanding of linguistics informs each and every naming project at Catchword.”

Naming

Catchword was co-founded by sociolinguist, Laurel Sutton, and as they describe on their website: Many of our multilingual staff have degrees in linguistics, and we use this expertise to eliminate potential problems long before name candidates are recommended or screened. For all naming projects, we utilize standard, English-based linguistic tools - metaphors, similes, synonyms, metonymy, toponyms - but typically, we go even further, exploring Indo-European roots (which are easily understood by speakers of most European languages), as well as semantically related words in language groups such as Polynesian and Finno-Ugric. When developing globally appropriate names, we're keenly aware of pronunciation issues, such as consonant clusters, which are difficult for Japanese speakers, and vowel sounds that don't exist in Arabic. Our names generally do not require translation; they are pronounceable, if not meaningful, in every required language.”

Management Consulting

For a more “on the ground” look at the life of a linguist working in business, Sonia Checcia provides us a “day in the life” of her marketing communications role in a Management Consulting firm.

- *4-6 conference calls*
- *1-2 hours of “quiet” work on 1-2 “deliverables” (either developing a power point, writing articles for company newsletter, designing a newsletter)*
- *Tons of email*
- *Ad hoc discussions / inquires from the people I manage*

When I asked her to provide some more detail about the specific tasks involved in this work:

- *Consulting with project/program managers (i.e., conducting needs assessment discussions, reviewing data, analyzing data) on their marketing needs and building marketing and communications strategy to support needs*
- *Developing articles, posters, slick sheets, and other collateral to promote company programs (such as new training course, new mentoring program, etc.)*
- *Editing other people’s work to get it client ready*
- *Writing newsletters (interviewing people, a little journalism to research/draft articles, designing graphics)*
- *Planning team meetings (making recommendations on how to best spend the meeting time to achieve desired results, setting agenda, briefing senior leaders, briefing meeting emcee, polishing slides for presentation)*
- *Managing people; giving performance feedback and developing staff*
- *Managing three websites*
- *Managing strategy for external visibility (industry awards submissions, conference presentations, publications)*

When I asked Sonia to reflect on how it is that her linguistics training comes to bear on the day-to-day work, she explained:

I do a lot of writing and draw on my training to find the most concise, memorable way to express what I need to write—whether it’s a poster, newsletter article, or email from the boss—and to avoid misunderstandings or confusion. For the executive communications I prepare, I have to think a lot about positioning and audience and ensure I am supporting the goals (e.g., building trust, creating solidarity, etc.)

After having been trained in linguistics we come to look at the world in new ways that inform our engagement with the tasks that will be presented to us as employees. Sonia’s is but one example.

And now for something completely different... Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an exciting arena in the business sector for people wishing to enact social change in the world through their work. To read more about one Career

Linguist, Renee Tomlin's work in social corporate responsibility (CSR), look at her profile in the Professional Paths for Linguists section of Career Linguist: <https://careerlinguist.com/a-conversation-about-csr/>

Research (R)

It is perhaps unsurprising that people who have chosen to study linguistics go on to find meaningful work in research, after all, our training prepares us as researchers, so a field like linguistics may well attract people who are already interested. But what perhaps has been the most eye-opening for me in my own exploration into this world of work have been the range of contexts in which researchers are happily employed in sectors ranging from government, to non-governmental agencies and non-profits, in the private sector (business), or think-tanks. The nuts and bolts of the research work that you may be called upon to do in such contexts may very closely resemble the research and writing that you did as part of your training in linguistics, as I will now describe in a bit of detail.

Consumer Research

Also called Market Research, this work can rely heavily on ethnography. This description is drawn from the website of Practica Group (practicagroup.com), a qualitative market research group with offices in Chicago and New York:

People are meaning-makers - and so we believe that products, services or brands are best seen and understood in the contexts of life-as-lived, where meaning is created. We spend time with individuals in their own lived settings — homes (or offices, parks, museums, stores) where they are surrounded by possessions, connected to colleagues, friends or family and immersed in life. Engaging with research participants in their environments, not ours, provides the groundwork for insights about who they are, and how a particular product, brand or service is integrated into everyday life - practically, emotionally, symbolically.

Consumer research might involve an exploration of anything from cleaning practices, to the meaning of gold, ideas about health, the activity of investing, art, the rituals of meal times, how cars fit and don't with life values, or the life of the endurance athlete. The application of the research is often in the form of developing or positioning products, or the work may be conducted in order to help bring market segments to life.

Our skills at challenging assumptions and contemplating multiple perspectives make us skilled observers who can bring powerful insights to market research work. Research firms often specialize, for example by choosing to focus on a particular kind of client - as has the FrameWorks Institute, who work with advocates, scientists, policymakers, and nonprofit leaders engaged in a particular kind of goal (i.e. furthering public understanding of specific social issue) – NB: we will hear more about FrameWorks' work in the N (non-profits) portion of the acronym. Or a firm may specialize in their methods. Practica group, for example, focuses on qualitative or blending quantitative and qualitative methods. Many large organizations have research teams in-house.

User Experience Research

Many linguists are very happily employed as user experience researchers, as linguists can draw from their experience in interviewing and participant observation to engage with people to get feedback about existing products and product concepts. Linguists are also skilled at organizing this information about users, once collected, and figuring out how best to communicate it to benefit product development, marketing, branding and any other aspects that gain relevance.

Holly L. entered her job search looking for a way to apply her training in discourse analysis to the real world (a task that felt enormous!). But networking and knowing how to “sell” her skills as a linguist landed Holly a position first at an applied research company in the Washington DC area, where she worked in user experience testing. She has since moved to Boulder Colorado where she is an in-house researcher for a school district, but this discussion will describe the work that she did at her first job in user research, which Holly sums up as: “Clients bring us questions based on observation,” and we come up with a way to answer those questions.”

User research work may include drawing feedback from user interactions with various interfaces, and reporting back to clients with deliverables in the form of reports, slide decks, and raw data (recordings, data sheets, etc.). This process does not involve testing people or their behaviors, Holly is quick to clarify. Rather, her team works to examine services or products developed by the client, using people’s behavior or reactions as a means of measurement. What matters to clients are the real-world implications of this work, and recommendations for improvement, as opposed to form and function (what behaviors are exhibited and why?) and theoretical implications. Holly’s advice on incorporating your linguistic training into a “real-world” position like hers? “If you want the people around you on board with linguistics, you need to sell it to your boss and to the client.” When doing applied research – from start to finish – you want the employer and the client to see linguistics and its role in every aspect of what you are contributing. In other words, “sell the importance of linguistics in every step of the process.” For example, when using a focus group as a research tool, your linguistic training might enhance your role as moderator, equipping you to interact with the subjects and to analyze their responses with a nuanced understanding of their use of language. Don’t let this go unnoticed!

One important application of user experience research is in web development and design. As part of a workshop that he organized for students at Georgetown in the MA in Language and Communication (MLC) program, Jermy Reynolds (then a 6th year PhD student), invited Rob Pongsajapan, from Georgetown University’s center for instructional design – Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS) to talk about web design and other professional applications of research interviewing. Rob gave a workshop focused on the MLC program website. The redesigned site now may be found at: <https://mlc.linguistics.georgetown.edu/>

Immediately after the event, Jermy wrote up this description on the MLC blog (read the full post here: <https://mlc.linguistics.georgetown.edu/2012/02/24/mlc-brownbag-1-web-identity-and-user-centered-design-process/>)

What I really liked about this presentation is that it combined a practical, organizational necessity (web design and user-centered content) with a sociolinguistically-oriented skill set (web-identity construction, interviewing) in an interactive, yet systematic process. I could definitely see myself putting these skills to use in a professional or volunteer context, especially considering the abundance of less-than-ideally designed websites out there. This assumes, of course, that I have a good web developer by my side...

Jermy ended up pursuing user-interface work himself, and now is very happily employed with a tech firm in the Bay Area (more on this kind of work in the T (tech) portion of the acronym). But just to end this section here, Jermy's LinkedIn profile summary currently reads: "To make the digital lives of people bit easier and more enjoyable - that is my job." There are many big-picture outcomes for research for those who are excited about putting these skills to good use!

Innovation / Industry (I)

With my BRIGHTEN acronym, I play a bit with the vowels, and here with "I" will tackle both Innovation and Industry in turn. So, first I would like to make a point about innovation. All linguists who have found professional application of their skills and training are innovative, and neither is innovation the exclusive domain of linguists nor is it contained within this bucket any more than it is in the other buckets profiled here: e.g. research, business, education. However, to have chosen to study linguistics in the first place, I would hazard a guess that you are innovative, and thus would ask you to consider whether this keyword might inform your job search and professional self-presentation.

By calling attention to "industry" I invite a bit of closer reflection on this term that I hear bandied about in "where are linguists working in industry?" To complicate our way of thinking about this term, I here call attention to innovative ways that linguists are out there identifying institutional needs and then creating opportunities for themselves that fill these needs. Take Magen for example, whose story I present in her words:

Upon graduating with an MA in linguistics, I found myself dissatisfied with the job market and decided to start my own Design and Communication Strategies company. In June 2011, one of my clients (a group of veterinary research laboratories) brought me on full time as a Communication Strategist. Over the past year, I have helped manage/design/build three websites for the company. I am responsible for creating visual/verbal content for all three sites in addition to acting as project manager for any projects related to our internet presence. This year, we'll be launching the company's first ever mobile application, which I conceptualized, pushed for, then designed. My current elevator speech at conventions and national meetings is "I'm the future". I then clarify that I'm responsible for crafting and managing my company's mobile and online presences. I love my job because it allows me to incorporate my linguistics background with my love of design. Our company's mission this year is improved communication with pet owners – something I'm very excited to sink my teeth into, as I truly love

working for a company that helps improve quality of life for pets and, subsequently, their loving owners.

I also appreciate the creative approach to work by people like Sara, who needed flexibility with her schedule because she is a young mom and also because she did not want to relocate from a home on the rural Midwestern United States. Thus she combines contract work for a healthcare communication firm with other interests, as she describes below:

Because I am an independent contractor, my routines can vary greatly. A busy week would involve flying to a major city (say, San Diego), checking into a hotel, going to a hospital and interviewing patients and doctors, and then returning home. I usually interview 3-5 patients a day after they visit with the doctor, and I interview the doctor after this about all of the patients. A typical trip will last 2-4 days.

In addition, I often have projects ongoing from a different company. Whether I am traveling or not, I am often looking through or performing analysis on data from social media for this company. I don't have to travel for this company, and I can do work for them whether or not I am traveling for company number one. If I am not traveling, I work from home. I am also a stay-at-home mom, so I usually work for two or three hours in the morning, two hours during nap, and then an additional two or three hours in the evening when Dad can take over.

Lastly, I miss my life as a teacher, so I teach an online course for Johns Hopkins University. Between my other tasks, I have to send emails and run this course, which occupies about 15-20 hours of my week for 12 students.

All in all, my days and weeks really vary, but generally I am working most evenings and weekends, but I get to raise my own child and have dinner with my family every night. Annnnd, No Rush Hour.

We will hear about more innovation in the E section of this resource, but as the examples of these innovative linguists have shown, with creativity, dedication and purpose, it is now more possible than ever to build the job that you want. For more on the nuts and bolts of this approach, I suggest reading *The Start-Up of You* by Reid Hoffman, founder of LinkedIn.

Government (G)

Working for “government” can take many shapes and forms, and can involve working at the federal, state/province, county, or local/municipal level. Many governmental organizations in the United States like the FBI and the State Department actively recruit linguists, although often by “linguist” they may mean translation, or language teaching and testing. However, there are plenty of interesting jobs in analysis that could involve research, interpretation, and also decoding, pattern-recognition,, and cultural studies work.

At the Federal level, Yuling Pan is one sociolinguist who brings her expertise about social interaction to fine-grained understandings of context to the U.S. Bureau of the Census in shaping the design and use of a survey instruments.

The Census Bureau

Sociolinguist Yuling Pan works as a Principal Researcher, Sociolinguist, and Group Leader in the Statistical Research Division of the bureau, drawing from her own PhD research in face and politeness theory to inform the design of questionnaires with Chinese speakers. As she explained to me: the Census Bureau employs linguists as researchers to investigate the following questions: *How are census questions designed? Do they get the info that they need? Are we asking questions in the right way?* According to Yuling, they are in need of sociolinguists at all levels (from interns to the PhD level). Some of the specific skills they look for include: Good interpersonal skills (particularly one-on-one interviewing), theoretical grounding in Phonology, Syntax, Semantics, Pragmatics, observational skills, an ability to recognize issues and recommend change, ability to work with people and do research collaboratively, ability to design a research topic/ research plan, flexibility and an open mind, language abilities in Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Vietnamese, and / or Russian.

Also at the Federal level, many linguists have found work as government contractors, for example Chris Phipps who we will read more about in a moment in the T (Technology) section of BRIGHTEN. Under contracting arrangements, specific areas of expertise get solicited as part of the bidding process, applying to work for particular projects sourced out of the agency or bureau. At the state or local level, working for government might mean being involved in access or advocacy, as we will now explore:

Office of Latino Affairs (OLA)

Drawing from her dissertation work in immigration and her field training as an ethnographer, Cecilia works as the Language Access and Advocacy Coordinator for OLA, which serves as the Mayor's liaison on issues concerning the Latino community. The purpose of the Language Access and Advocacy Program (LAAP) is to provide expertise and guidance to the agencies named under the Language Access Act. The Language Access component provides technical assistance and linguistic support to those DC government agencies named under the Language Access Act of 2004 (LAA) to ensure that their programs and services are delivered in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner to Latinos living in the city. Through its advocacy component, OLA recognizes that greater participation in local government programs and services has the potential of markedly improving the quality of life of non- and Limited English proficient populations, particularly those of Latino families, seniors, persons with disabilities, and children. As a result, the LAAP advocates on their behalf in and outside DC government, so that DC Latino residents may be better represented, informed, and able to access a full range of health, education, housing, economic development, and employment services. In addition, the LAAP serves as a linking mechanism that provides collaborative services to/between Latino community groups, the Mayor, DC government agencies, and private sector institutions.

Working for the government could also mean bringing expertise about linguistic style to investigate plagiarism or assess the worthiness of grant applications for the Office of the Inspector General of The National Science Foundation (NSF) like Aliza Chlewichi; it could involve research into knowledge management for NASA like Charlotte Linde has done (see my profile of her work on the career paths section: <https://careerlinguist.com/2013/07/24/planning-to-remember-my-conversation-with-charlotte-linde-narrative-and-organizational-memory/>); it could even mean bringing knowledge about language and culture to work at the Smithsonian Institution as has Ruth Rouvier who worked as Program Manager for the Smithsonian Institution's [Recovering Voices Program](#). Read the recent profile of Ruth's work on the Linguistic Society of America member spotlight section: <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/lisa-member-spotlight/jan14>.

Working for the government could also mean doing research for the military: the Army Research Institute, DARPA and the Naval Research Laboratory or for the Department of Veterans Affairs. For example, the Veteran's Health Administration has a robust division of Research and Development doing important work about issues facing today's veterans.

Health Care Communication (H)

Language is a central part of health care communication. We present our symptoms to doctors and nurses; we use the Web to gain information on symptoms and diagnoses; we read advertisements, and hear commercials about medicines; we follow directions and heed warnings about over-the-counter and prescription drugs. The efficacy of these communications can help, or hinder, health care. Linguists analyze, train, and consult with health care professionals to enhance the quality of health care through improved communication. Training in linguistics is broadly recognized and highly valued in many healthcare contexts including: analysis/training/consulting in doctor/patient communications; linguistic accommodation between expert and client; language of agency and responsibility.

There is unsurprisingly a great deal of academic research in the areas of discourse of medicine, science and health; narratives of illness and identity; therapeutic language. Healthcare communication is the primary sector employing (socio)linguistics in my network, including research firms like Verilogue and Ogilvy Common Health, or social media research firms for healthcare clients, firms like Marketeching (which we will hear more about shortly), or Kaiser Permanente's forward-thinking Garfield Innovation center, using insights from user experience research to change the way that medicine is practiced. Also, there are firms specializing in healthcare software like ElationEMR who hire lateral thinkers, but more on this in the T section of our acronym.

Verilogue

Let's look at a job recently advertised with Verilogue (<http://www.verilogue.com>). I have bolded some of the competencies that speak most directly to the skills and training of linguists.

Our Client Services group conducts and delivers market research projects based on our extensive database of physician-patient conversations. In doing so, we apply various

qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to deliver deep insights about disease education, treatment selection and emotional drivers of physician-patient behavior. Verilogue is seeking a ***Client Services Analyst*** with demonstrated analytical skills to work on a team to conduct dialogue based market research projects.

Primary Job Responsibilities

- **Analyze physician-patient dialogue data to answer client-specific research objectives;**
- **Prepare data for analysis** using Verilogue-specific analysis techniques and tools;
- **Manipulate and present data** using spreadsheets;
- **Research** healthcare markets and products for entry into Verilogue's custom database;
- Assist Client Services Directors and Managers in **creating strategic reports and presentations;**
- Build and maintain excellent client relationships through **delivery of superior customer insights;** and,
- Support multiple client projects.

Key Competencies

- Ability to conduct research and/or data analytics projects with minimal supervision;
- **Demonstrated analytical and communication skills;**
- Strong proficiency in MS Excel with a working knowledge of a variety of functions and data analysis techniques;
- Solid skills in other MS Office applications (Word, Excel and PowerPoint);
- Close attention to detail and accuracy with the ability to work on multiple projects; and,
- **Familiarity with qualitative and quantitative research principles.**
- Project management skills
- Strong written communications skills, willingness to be a contributing part of a strong team in a fast paced, high quality environment
- Knowledge of machine translation or natural language processing techniques a plus
- **Experience in corpus or text analysis, conversation analysis, or computational linguistics a plus**

Qualifications

- Minimum of a four (4) year degree is required; **Degree in Sociolinguistics preferred.**
- 0 – 3 years experience conducting research and/or data analytics is required;

I spoke with Kathryn Ticknor about her work at Verilogue specifically about how her background in linguistics served her in her work:

My background is everything to my job! Specifically, I analyze doctor-patient communication on behalf of organizations and companies' business objectives. These business objectives can range anywhere from specific product positioning to an

understanding of interaction dynamics in the doctor's office. I work in an industry far more familiar with quantitative data and large sample sizes. Part of my job is conveying the importance of qualitative, ethnographic, and linguistic analysis—even on a smaller scale—for understanding the communicative “reality” within which our clients work.

This is how she described her work in her resume in the Winter of 2014:

- Uses qualitative research methodologies to illuminate linguistic, social, and behavioral patterns based on observable moments of interaction. Manages, conducts and analyzes ethnographic market research domestically and globally across a variety of therapeutic areas to deliver high-impact, actionable insights for a variety of pharmaceutical and healthcare clients.

When I followed up with her a few months later in the Spring of 2014, she had a new version of her resume that she wanted to share, reflecting some recent projects that she had had the opportunity to work on and also active conversations that she had been having with her boss about how to develop and grow herself professionally.

- Uses qualitative research methodologies to illuminate linguistic, social, and behavioral patterns based on observable moments of interaction. Designs, manages and conducts ethnographic market research to deliver high-impact, actionable insights for pharmaceutical and healthcare clients across therapeutic areas including Multiple Sclerosis, Type 2 Diabetes, Obesity, Parkinson's Disease and the Oncology space.

Notice that as she cultivates experience, this gets represented in her resume in descriptions of specifics about projects that she has worked on, for example the increased responsibility for scope of work as captured by the addition of the word “designs” in “designs, manages and conducts ethnographic market research.” Kathryn and her employer share a very active approach to managing her career, which I think is worth emulating. In other words, this thinking about professional development is not just for now as you are searching for a job, it can inform and shape the course of your professional life!!

Social media analytics in healthcare

Monica works for a social media analytics firm that is focused on the healthcare sector called Marcheteching (marketeching.com/). When I asked her how linguistics shapes what she does on a daily basis, this was her answer:

There are no aspects of my role that do not involve or rely on my background in language and communication. The easy answer is the linguistic analytics, but also my communication with clients is an area in which I employ my training; very often, we have to figure out what the client wants, sometimes in spite of what they are actually saying. Also, we regularly have to communicate or explain complex insights that revolve around language, and my understanding of message and communication helps me effectively

communicate with audiences that contain people with varying backgrounds and motives.

There are also aspects of my background that help me better interact and manage our internal team, both in more formal HR-type settings, as well as when working cooperatively on reports. The top two skills or advantages are being able to identify and appreciate the communication styles of those I work with, and thus tailoring my communication with them accordingly, as well as my general sensitivity to the message I project by what and the way I communicate with our team.

As I hope this section has illustrated, if you have a passion for language as it is used in the healthcare, there are many opportunities in this sector for you. The healthcare sector is booming not in small part because of technological innovations, as we will now consider, but before leaving this section, I would also just want to make the point that the inroads which linguists have made into this sector can be looked at as an example of the possible ways that our skills and training could be utilized just about anywhere. Take the Verilogue job ad to someone who you think could benefit from linguistic insights to get their creative juices flowing about how your might inform the challenges that they are seeking to solve with their work.

Technology (T)

Google is probably the most famous creation of linguists, but organizations like IBM, Microsoft, Nuance Communications, and Mindsnacks also hire linguists. I have been heartened lately by job descriptions like this recent job [posting](#) from Twitter, seeking a Market Researcher:

“You are a master storyteller and believe data is more inspiring when it connects back to the lives of real people. You have a strong, working understanding of a wide range of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. You know exactly when to engage with teams across Design, Product, Engineering, and Marketing, what questions to ask, where to probe, and how to implement the most effective research strategies.”

Many organizations hire social media strategists, to which linguists bring a new perspective, as just one example Rosetta Stone, whose resident PhD linguist Aviad Eilam was recently profiled on PhDs at work: <http://phdsatwork.com/week-in-the-life/aviad-eilam-intro/>.

User-interface design

Bob works in EHR/EMR (Electronic Health Record/Electronic Medical Record), a category of healthcare software that deals primarily with documenting patient medical information for diagnostic, administrative, and billing purposes.

When I asked Bob, “what drew you to this job?” he responded:

The work that I do has real, measurable impact on the doctors that use our software and the patients they care for. By solving inefficiencies in documentation and patient/practice management, and by focusing on intelligently aggregating and

presenting patient data for the doctor to consume while working out a diagnosis, we help our doctors (a) spend more time with their patients and (b) make more informed clinical decisions, leading to more effective patient care. It's a lot easier to get up in the morning and stay late at night when you know that the work you'll ship will contribute, in a very tangible way, to the improvement of our healthcare system.

When I asked “How do you understand your background as shaping how you do what you do?” he gave me the answer in bullets, which I take to be telling of the communication conventions for his industry and sector. His response:

My background in Linguistics...

- 1. Made it much easier to teach myself programming languages.*
- 2. Helps me write effective marketing and advertising copy.*
- 3. Makes me a better user-interface designer.*

He went on to say:

Studying Theoretical Linguistics involves a lot of linguistic problem solving - take a finite set of utterances from a completely unfamiliar language, identify the patterns, and extract the phonologic, morphologic, and syntactic rules. Then, apply those rules to generate new grammatical output in the source language. I would later discover that the same exercise could be applied in the context of reading through the source code of a webpage to learn HTML and CSS. I identified patterns in the language, formulated rules about the syntax, and tested my hypotheses by writing HTML and seeing what visual output was generated in my web browser. And from that experimentation, I went on to continue front-end development professionally (which I continue today).

Working as a product manager at a tech startup in San Francisco, a general understanding of programming languages is an absolute necessity. Through Linguistics, I'm able to intuitively understand much of the logic behind programming; an invaluable skill when collaborating with engineers.

I design and write copy for email communications, our website, mailers, and faxes (yes, the healthcare industry still relies heavily on fax!), and especially when communicating with a specific, esoteric group like physicians, training in Linguistics poses an advantage.

Linguistics taught me to be perceptive and sensitive to the unique communicative behavior of physicians (which I'm mostly exposed to in a clinical context). Identifying the commonalities of their communication as a community – which include optimization for brevity, explicit separation of subjective and objective components of an argument, and a proclivity to use checklists to understand the full scope of a situation - helps me not only tailor our language to be similar to theirs, but also understand them better as people. It quickly shines through in their language that physicians are thorough, detail-

oriented, cautious, and chronically short on time, all of which are extremely important to internalize when trying to reach them effectively with marketing copy.

Being a user-interface designer represents a perfect harmony of my background in Linguistics and visual art. Language, iconography, and visual design (which includes form, layout, color, animation) unite to communicate the rules and functions of software via the user interface. User-interface designer Jared Spool said, “Good design, when it’s done well, becomes invisible. It’s only when it’s done poorly that we notice it.” Framed another way, good design is successful communication. When that communication breaks down, people notice.

As a user-interface designer, I am, in a sense, an interpreter. I help our users interact with complex algorithms and backend machinery through an array of button clicks and text inputs. I then take the output of our system – a vast collection of patient data - and optimize it for consumption.

When it comes to consumption, structuring text and information on a page is an art form that’s garnered much more attention since the advent of the Internet. Eye-tracking studies performed over the last decade help us understand how people read what’s presented on a screen, where they focus their attention, and how they scan for clues that will lead them to what they seek. I don’t have the luxury of asking the user what they’re looking for; everything is presented at once, and it’s about harnessing visual design to communicate to the user where to accomplish their goals.

Some final words about technology and data from Holly L, who we spoke with earlier in the Research section:

Any company that is using an app for data collection needs someone to figure out what to do with that data. The best thing to do is find those companies and remind them how lost they are without you. 😊

There is so much to be said about work in the technology sector, but I think that one of the best resources that I can point you towards to educate yourself if you want to dig deeper is the website of Christopher Phipps: www.LousyLinguist.com.

Education/Entrepreneurship (E)

As I explained above in the I section of this resource, I play a bit with the vowels in this acronym – such that E can stand for either / both Education and Entrepreneurship.

Let’s begin with Education.

Many graduates of linguistics become educators or education researchers, as indeed many people come to linguistics from a teaching background, often language teaching specifically – me included, I taught English in Costa Rica, I taught Spanish in Texas and have taught and

tutored both Spanish and English before and since, but the applications of such a background extend far beyond teaching language in a classroom. Training in linguistics can help teachers more effectively communicate with their students, to understand how language operates within the classroom and in the wider community. A teacher trained as a linguist is skilled in recognizing how language used in the classroom reflects and constructs social identities (such as gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, race, region, and class), or how knowledge of pragmatics (how language functions in context) can help teachers to identify critical elements of language which play a role in communicating meaning. Such knowledge can inform both the process and products of education, including how teachers design lectures and structure classroom interactions to more effectively meet the needs of a range of learners.

And it works well that the next section of our acronym, N is non-profits, because the first organization that I want to feature is an educational non-profit:

The Center for Applied Linguistics

From their website:

The mission of the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) is to promote language learning and cultural understanding by serving as a trusted source for research, resources, and policy analysis. Through its work, CAL seeks solutions to issues involving language and culture as they relate to access and equity in education and society around the globe.

CAL also has a set of core values that guide all of our endeavors and help us focus our efforts more effectively. These values are outlined below and reflect CAL's strong commitment to promoting access, equity, and mutual understanding for linguistically and culturally diverse people around the world.

- *Languages and cultures are important individual and societal resources.*
- *All languages, dialects, and cultures deserve to be respected and cultivated.*
- *Multilingualism is beneficial for individuals and society.*
- *Effective language education should be widely available.*
- *Accurate information should be the basis for policies and practices that involve language and culture.*
- *Language skills and cultural knowledge should be valued in work situations.*
- *Language and cultural differences should not be obstacles to personal or group success or well-being.*

Higher education administration

Linguistics may also come to life professionally in Higher Education Administration contexts. Many linguists work as program administrators, deans, in student services (like study abroad advisors) or academic services like Admissions, as does Alison, a sociolinguist:

I would say that the administration side of higher education comprises almost the "behind the scenes" functions and responsibilities of a university that might not typically be associated with the higher ed industry. For example, when I tell people I work at a University, they often assume I am a professor or lecturer. In reality, there are far more

higher education administrators at universities and colleges than there are professors, working in admissions offices, institutional research, registrar's offices, student accounts, etc. Part of what I do every day is talk to prospective students and/or applicants on the phone or in my office. So much of how I approach these interactions is through concepts and/or strategies I learned in my conversation analysis class in grad school. Something from that class that really stuck with me is the practice of interrupting in turn-taking. People's styles related to this can be either highly involved or highly considerate. A highly involved participant may give a lot of oral feedback during a conversation, and this may be seen as an interruption to the other interlocutor, depending on his or her conversational style. I think that generally speaking my conversational style can be described as highly involved; however, I realize that this may perhaps seem aggressive to someone whose style can be defined as highly considerate. Therefore, in my interactions with prospective students and applicants, this is definitely something I am cognizant of.

Moreover, my job requires that I attend a lot of meetings with lots of different people from different offices across campus. Having a good understanding of people's conversational styles in general is extremely helpful. My colleagues and I often receive praise from others for our ability to work well with a variety of offices, and I know that my training in language and communication is a large part of the reason I am able to effectively communicate with different people.

Working in Higher Ed. Administration is a great way to stay in a university environment, and for a job in this context, having spent a considerable time in school is an asset. Many schools also offer tuition remission as a benefit for employees, which is a really great perk!

Leadership training & development

As another profile in education (this one from the Business sector), Kim works in Leadership Training & Development. Specifically, Kim is a project coordinator in the Leadership Development Group within the Human Resources (HR) division at a major investment firm. When I asked her what drew her to HR originally:

I enjoyed specific aspects of the job duties. When I started my first job in HR, I was particularly excited to do:

- 1) recruiting, because I liked finding the right people for the job; I liked the challenge of high quotas (# of people to hire, short amount of time)*
- 2) training and development, as part of the challenge of fixing the problem of retention rate (combination of "hire 10, keep 1" mentality and firing people who couldn't cut it after a month or so plus people quitting who are good).*

And then about her current job in Training:

I'm drawn to Training because I value education and think that ongoing "education" of people in the workplace is necessary and enriching. I am drawn to Recruiting because I

get satisfaction out of finding the right match for people, giving them a job and a new opportunity, and “selling” them on the opportunity when I decide I want to hire them.

The World Bank

Michelle’s work provides another example of training, but in a different professional context. She works for the World Bank. The following is taken from her professional bio:

Michelle’s work in the Human Development Division at the World Bank Institute, the training wing of the World Bank, involves helping to design and deliver learning activities for developing countries on topics in education reform. Managing learning events with up to 100 participants and resource staff from a variety of national, linguistic and cultural backgrounds requires a constant awareness of the differences (and similarities!) one must take into account in such an environment. As such, Michelle has been happy to have had training that has permitted her to help make each experience a comfortable and enjoyable one for participants of all backgrounds.

Michelle’s professional experience provides a nice segue to non-profits as the World Bank (pieces of it anyway) are structured like a non-profit organization, but before I leave the “E” section, I want to give a bit of attention to Entrepreneurship.

According to Reid Hoffman in *The Alliance*, entrepreneurial thinking is going to be expected of all of us going forward, because the world of work is changing. To tell the story of entrepreneurship, I thought I would start with someone who is just at the beginning of the journey (Ryan) and then introduce you to someone who is a bit further along (Barbara Clark, who has incorporated as You Say Tomato).

So, a tale of two entrepreneurs, starting with Ryan:

I was entering the private sector after I completed a long military career, so this was probably one of the bigger career transitions I would ever have in my life. I approached it as a “rare opportunity to be whatever I wanted to be.” Unfortunately, I had some trouble figuring out exactly what I wanted to do. I knew that I wanted to become involved with China in some way, so I began looking for China business jobs. But all of the jobs seemed to require relocation to another state (or country). Still other jobs offered lower salaries than I needed to sustain the level of support I was providing my family. And that “perfect” job never seemed to materialize. It was very disenchanting. Finally, I started to realize that if I couldn’t find the job I wanted, I should make one for myself by starting my own business. So I began taking courses on entrepreneurship and to plan out the starting of my own business. In the meantime, I took an “OK” job that would bring a salary into my home while I built the “dream job” in my spare time. Having so much trouble (5 months) of looking for ideal work was extremely painful for my ego and my pocketbook, but the lessons I got out of the experience were priceless, and have set me on the very liberating and stimulating path I am on today!

I knew for certain that I wanted to be in business for myself. The only question was which industry to choose to build a company in. I chose filmmaking, because it is one of my life's passions and favorite hobbies. So I felt it was time to give myself a chance to go for it as a career. Currently, I am still in the process of building my video production company, and haven't jumped into it full time yet. So I work from 9-5 for a large consulting firm in the defense industry. I get home, cook dinner, relax for awhile. Then from around 7 or 8 PM until midnight (or long after), I work on my production company. I have been doing one or two projects per week to build my portfolio. It is extremely difficult, but it this work is necessary to prepare for the day that I can jump into my own company full time.

You Say Tomato

Barbara Clark's description of her business *You Say Tomato* is helpful for getting into the themes of story (listening, finding, and telling) in the professional context, as on her website, she gives both a "short version" and a "long version" of her story:

The short version:

Hello! My name is Barbara Clark. I want to help your organisation work better and more efficiently. Communication in the workplace or other institutional setting plays a crucial part in how that organisation functions, and when things go wrong, they can go wrong in a big way. Planes can crash, patients can die, suspects can escape because of miscommunication. I want to work with you to reduce or eliminate these potentials for error. As a trained linguist and anthropologist, I can look at the way your organisation works, and offer suggestions and advice for improvements and alterations, to help you work better. I've consulted with governmental organisations and major international airlines to help them improve communication, update practices, and identify issues which could contribute to negative consequences as a result of miscommunication. Please get in touch if you would like to know more about what I can do for you.

And the longer version:

I call myself a linguistic anthropologist, and what this means is that I am interested in the relationship between the language we use, and the context in which we talk. I am interested in our talk and the contexts in which our talk take place. I (and many other linguists) believe that context has a direct influence on our talk. Context can mean all sorts of things, including who we are talking to, why we are talking, and what is being said. Context can include the power dynamics between speakers: chances are you talk differently to your best friend than you do to the person who makes your daily latte or changes your oil, and you talk differently still to the person who holds power over you, whether it be your boss, a policeman, a judge, or a professor.

My PhD thesis, [Safety Talk and Service Culture: Flight Attendant Discourse in Commercial Aviation \(PDF, opens in new window\)](#), looks at how flight attendants use language in two different contexts to construct a professional identity. The two contexts (inflight incident reports written by flight attendants and submitted to a US government agency,

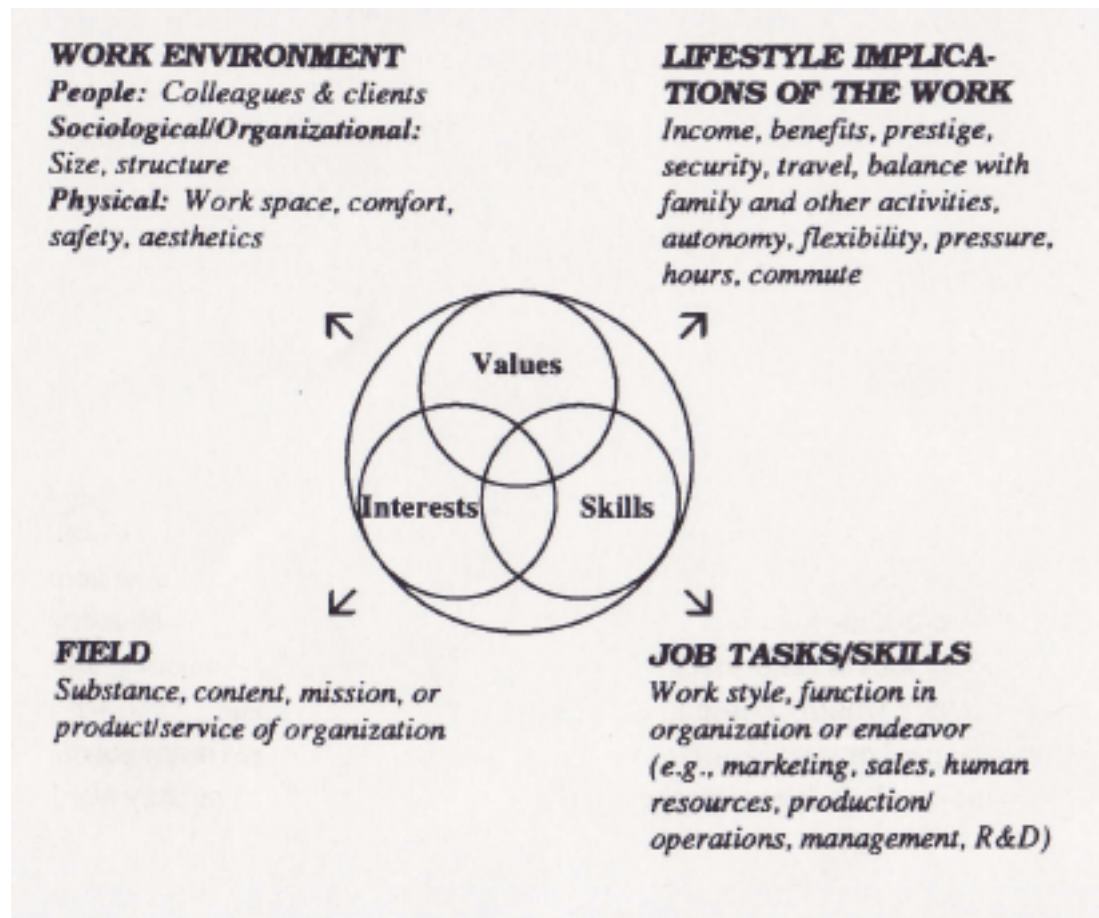
and online discussion forums populated by flight attendants and not affiliated with government agencies or airline employers) are quite different yet in both contexts, flight attendants' talk repeatedly displays their concern with and acceptance of their role in aviation safety and airline profitability via the unique safety and service work they do. What this means for airline employers is that flight attendants are a valuable employee group, and one which can arguably be drawn on as resources for increasing passenger loyalty, aviation safety, and profitability.

My interest in aviation emerged from ten years working as a flight attendant for a major US airline, where I worked both international and domestic flights, and worked with a wide variety of flight attendants and pilots. I experienced firsthand the importance of using situationally appropriate 'ways of speaking' in order to do my job the most effectively and efficiently that I could. I strongly believe that the way we talk and communicate with each other influences how we interact. This relationship is crucial in times of emergency on aircraft.

My research entails looking at a situation in which talk is taking place, and using different methods to try to understand what is happening, both superficially (i.e., what is being said), and under the surface (i.e., why it is being said, and what really is happening in the interaction). If you have a situation where you would like to understand, for example, why an unwanted effect or situation is repeatedly taking place, please get in contact, and I would be happy to talk further about how I can help you.

Non-profits (N)

Many people who work for non-profits are very motivated by the mission of the organization. I use this image taken from Karen Newhouse's *Beyond The Ivory Tower* often to elucidate the influence of work motivators. In the vocabulary of this schematic, employees in the non-profit sector are more fulfilled when the intersection of their values, skills and interests pulls towards the "Field."



taken from Karen Newhouse: *Beyond the Ivory Tower*.

The FrameWorks Institute

One example of a mission-driven organization, FrameWorks designs, conducts and publishes communications research to prepare nonprofit organizations to expand their constituency base, to build public will, and to further public understanding of specific social issues. Their tagline: "Changing the conversation on social issues." In addition to working closely with social policy experts familiar with the specific issue, FrameWorks' work is informed by a team of communications scholars and practitioners who are convened to discuss the research problem, and to work together in outlining potential strategies for advancing remedial policies. FrameWorks also critiques, designs, conducts and evaluates communications campaigns on social issues. Its work is based on an approach called "Strategic Frame Analysis, which has been developed in partnership with UCLA's Center for Communications and Community.

Closing Idea

As you learn more about yourself, your skills interests and values, continue to pay attention to how you talk about these, and don't forget to ask for feedback!

Remember that this resource is setting you up to be able to more effectively tell stories that show employers / investors / clients why it is that THEY need you, and to develop a practice of talking about the WHY of your work:

1. Become more aware of the skills cultivated by linguistics and how these might be applied to work and to your job search
2. Learn about yourself through written description of skills and abilities of actual jobs held by actual linguists
3. Recognize and appreciate some of the differences between your own particular areas of interest and focus (even among a group of linguists, you will hear about different skills and abilities that are particularly valued, highlighted, and called into focus)
4. **Bring analytical awareness of language to the stories that you tell about yourself – enacting a critical deictic shift: from thinking and talking in terms of why you want the job to thinking and talking about why THEY need YOU**
5. **Cultivate a practice of talking about yourself – we will call this “professional self-presentation”- focusing on the WHY (WHY your approach uniquely valuable)**

This work begins with identifying your skills, some further reading might be in order:

Some further reading

My recently released book [Bringing Linguistics to Work](#) (available at Lulu.com) features many more stories of linguists at work, as well as details and activities to help you work through steps 1-5 above.

What Color is Your Parachute is a must-read! Updated annually, designed to help you think about yourself along 6 dimensions (or petals in their conceptualization)

You Majored in What? Mapping Your Path from Chaos to Career Katharine Brooks looks at career searching through the lens of chaos theory, engaging creativity in ways that motivate problem-solving.

Po Bronson’s book *What Should I Do with My Life?* is extremely helpful for generating creativity and inviting curiosity in identifying the challenges that are speaking to you.

Finally *“So What Are You Going to do with That? “ A guide to Career-Changing for M.A.s and Ph.D’s* is another one of my favorites. One of the reasons I love this book can be noticed right there in the title: “career-changing.” Graduate students can sometimes think that they are only now embarking on their first career search. The truth is that if you have pursued or are pursuing graduate –level training, you are already on a career path

Don’t forget to take a look at the many resources for job-seeking linguists on my website www.CareerLinguist.com

[Linguist-friendly organizations](#)

[The WoW Series](#) – exploring worlds of work in depth

[Professional Paths of Linguists](#)

[Stories around the Campfire series](#) – conversations with linguists about the problems they solve in their work

More information about [Bringing Linguistics to Work](#), including book events!

...and here's to what's next!