Small, but mighty: Multidisciplinary TA training in Linguistics

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Who are we? Why are we here?

Rachel:

- TA Training Coordinator for Department of Linguistics
- Graduate TA and Sessional Instructor in Linguistics

Kaili:

- Graduate TA in Linguistics
- Former secondary school teacher

Katherine:

- Undergraduate TA in Linguistics and Cantonese

Department of Linguistics in numbers (2021-2022)

3 major sub-fields

22 undergraduate courses
(beginner and advanced level)

17 Instructors

37 Teaching Assistants
(graduate and undergraduate)

A multi-faceted field

3 major sub-fields

Phonetics & Phonology: The study of sound and language typology
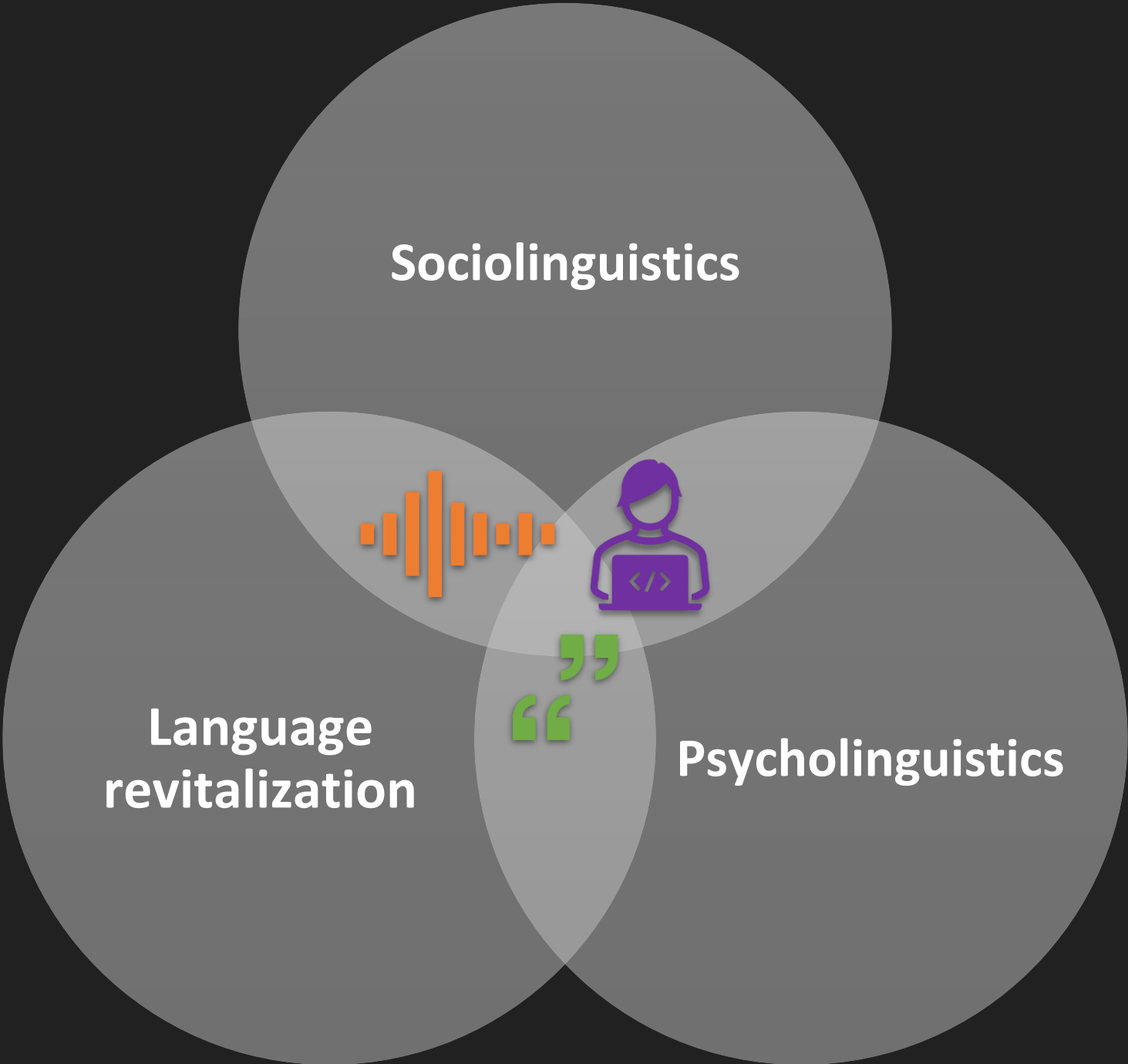
Acoustics, Pattern Recognition

Syntax & Semantics: The study of sentence & meaning

Grammar, Formal logic

Computational Linguistics: Computational language analysis

Computer science, Engineering

Sociolinguistics

Language revitalization

Psycholinguistics

Linguistics TA Training Program goals

1. **Mobilize linguistics TAs to teach a broad range of content from different subfields.**
    - *Pedagogical Strategies for Linguistics TAs*

2. **Engage TAs in discussions about Indigenous content as part of our work toward reconciliation.**
    - *Indigenous Language Representation in Linguistics Classrooms*

3. **Cultivate engagement and foster a community of TAs where teaching and learning is prioritized.**
    - *Letter of Commendation Program*

Pedagogical Strategies for Linguistics TAs

- From learner to educator

- Cross-disciplinary strategies → linguistics-specific contexts
  - Collaborative Learning Techniques; e.g. Send a Problem
  - Alternative Learning Techniques; e.g. Concepts and Applications
  - Sample exercises; e.g.
    Two LING students provided different word trees for "endearment". Alex identified the morpheme "-dear-" as a noun, while Bavika identified it as an adjective. Provide an argument for whether "-dear-" should be considered a noun or an adjective.

- Feedback from LING TAs
  - "It's always helpful to consider different techniques and I think having really honest and practical conversation about how they might be applied was good."
  - Would love more opportunities to share and discuss their own specific challenges.

Indigenous Language Representation in Linguistics Classrooms

- Department-internal facilitators with first-hand language revitalization experience.

- Open, honest, unrecorded conversations.

- Small-group discussions where TAs can consider the language we use to talk about Indigenous languages in the classroom.
  - e.g., What perspective is implicit (or explicit) in these terms as they relate to Indigenous languages? *Extinct language, Dead/Dying language, Endangered language, Dialect of a language*

Letter of Commendation Program

Level 1: Basic skills development	- Attend training workshops on basic skills - Pedagogical strategies - Grading skills - Equity and inclusion workshop - First Nations and Indigenous engagement workshop
Level 2: Mentorship	Think more deeply about own and other TAs' teaching through peer-review
Level 3: Leadership	Expand pedagogical profile by creating novel teaching materials and hosting teaching workshops

Where are we going/growing?

- While this program has been curated for TAs in linguistics, the nature of our discipline and the collaborative approach we take ultimately underscore teaching skills and training structures that are foundational and interdisciplinary.

Our long-term goals:

- Build on existing initiatives (e.g., *Peer Review Program*)

- Connect with Computational linguistics

- Balancing general TA training sessions with workshops addressing specific needs (e.g., *TA Needs Assessment Survey*)

Thank you! Questions?

Follow-up discussion

1. Have you faced similar obstacles/scenarios in which you must train TAs to teach a range of content?

1. How can these approaches be applied in other departments? What would this look like for your TAs?