PICKING A TOPIC

What is linguistics research? What can we do?

Linguistics *MENU*

It can be hard to pick a topic for Linguistics research, but it's easy to start and to narrow down your choices. Just follow this menu and make your selections...

- In the technical/theoretical domain, there are:
  Phonetics - Phonology - Morphology - Syntax - Semantics - Pragmatics
  Or: What kind of things about language do you want to study?

- Applying it... (using one or more of the above technical domains)
  (Pure) theoretical - Sociolinguistics - (1st/2nd lg) Acquisition - Psycholinguistics - Historical (vs. Synchronic/"theoretical") - Descriptive/fieldwork - Typology (comparative) - Computational/NLP
  Or: What do you want to do with the information? What questions will you ask?

  You'll also probably need a particular **theory**.

- And of course you'll need to **pick a language** (or languages).
  Or: What language do you want to research?

Once you've chosen that much, you'll be able to start looking for a good topic in a narrower subfield. Usually, good topics are not too broad and not too narrow.

The best topics identify a gap in current research: they connect with existing work, but they don't repeat it. It's difficult to work on a completely unexplored topic (especially when you're just starting), but it's important to contribute something new. Look at existing work to see how it could be expanded and what the next related questions are.

Usually a term paper for a course is a good way to start, but that's not required.

Important note: remember that if you plan to do surveys, experiments or other interaction with *Human Subjects* you'll need approval from the IRB **before** you start! (This requirement applies to **ALL** research beyond course term papers and *informal*, *unofficial* pilot testing that will never be published or reported at conferences!!)