

## SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR THESES

This document provides an overview of possible topics for final theses (BA, MA, Staatsexamen) supervised by members of the linguistics department. The topic suggestions listed below are not exhaustive and, for the most part, merely point to areas of research; other project proposals are welcome.

If you are interested, contact the instructor(s) by e-mail or, preferably, attend one of their office hours.

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# PROF. DR. SABINE FIEDLER

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## Phraseology

- The use and function of pragmatic idioms (e.g. *(Having) said that; Nice try; Fair enough*)
- Phraseology in particular text types (e.g. blogs, online forums, Wikipedia discussions, on-line reviews)
- (Lehramt): Teachers' formulaic performance
- Collocations in academic writing
- The impact of English on German phraseology (studies of particular genres, tv formats etc.)
- Phraseology in English as a lingua franca
- Phraseology as a translation problem

## Humour research

- Techniques of verbal humour in political satire
- Translating verbal humour (studies of particular genres)
- Humour in semiotically complex genres (advertisements, cartoons, memes etc.)
- Humour in the workplace
- "Corona humour" (several approaches possible, e.g. humour and taboo, globalization of humour)
- Humour: a universal phenomenon that is culturally tinted?

## English as a lingua franca

- English as a corporate language in international work settings (case studies)
- Humour in non-native speaker communication

## The impact of English on other languages

- Studies of Anglicisms in particular genres and domains
- Anglicisms and semantic change ("*Ein Top-Angebot für Sie und Ihre **Kids***" vs. "*Es ist nicht leicht, Karriere und **Kind** miteinander zu vereinbaren*")
- *At the end of the day - al final del día, die gläserne Decke - le plafond de verre*: comparative studies on Anglicisms
- *Communitymasken, Containment Scouts und Exitstrategie* – Anglicisms in the time of corona

Your thesis should be based on empirical work, which means that you are expected to collect your own data or use existing sources that are electronically available. Other ideas are welcome. See also 'Supervision' on my homepage.

## DR. ANTJE QUICK

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- Cognitive linguistics
- Bilingualism: individual and societal
- Language acquisition: monolingual and bilingual, especially morpho-syntactic interface
- Contact linguistics and resulting phenomena, e.g. code-mixing, transfer phenomena, influence of L1 on L2 and vice versa
- Cognitive effects of bilingualism, e.g. executive control, working memory development
- Corpus linguistics
- Developmental disorders and language acquisition, e.g. dyslexia, ASD
- L2 acquisition

# DR. SYLVIA REUTER

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**Bachelor's and Master's theses** as well as final theses for **Staatsexamen** conducted under my supervision fall into three very broad linguistic fields, namely (1) the history of the English language, (2) varieties of English, and (3) phonetics and phonology. The topics may as well be intertwined. Below, I list some very general as well as some more precise topics, all of them being open to adaptation and modification in accord with your interest. Of course, refinement of content, depth or scope and clarifying materials, i.e. in many cases data collection, shall follow shortly – either in consultation with me or by yourself as you familiarize yourself with relevant state-of-the-art research results and theoretical framework.

## **History of the English language**

- changes in the different phases and on different levels (phonology, morphology, syntax, spelling, borrowings, word formation, semantics)
  - Old English possessor genitives
  - The -s genitive, of-phrase and noun + noun variants from Middle English to Early Modern English
  - aspects of use, variation and distribution in OE, ME and EModE, i.e. structural phenomena in relation to place, dialect, group of speakers
  - ME dialects
  - ME sociolectal features
  - The Paston letters
  - Measurement constructions: cooking recipes from OE to PDE
  - Early American texts, such as Richard Blome 1673 *Britannia: Or, A Geographical Description of the Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, With the Isles and Territories Thereto Belonging: And for the Better Perfecting of the Said Work, There Is Added an Alphabetical Table of the Names, Titles, and Seats of the Nobility and Gentry That Each County of England and Wales Is, or Lately Was, Enobled With*
  - onomastics and toponymy in Middle English
  - Stress Patterns Then and Now: Analogy, least effort or language contact? Or: why is stress in Modern English so diversified?
  - Middle English Texts: The York Corpus Christie Plays, Canterbury Tales, ...
  - *Sumer Is Icumen In* – The English Language in compositions of past centuries (lyrics in pieces by Byrd, Tallis, Dowland, Purcell, Handel, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and others)
  - ...
- a close reading and linguistic investigation of particular texts and their writers includes the exploration of their historical and social context, allowing a "crossover" with cultural or literary studies

## Varieties of English

- sociolinguistics & gender: linguistic differences; discourse behaviour in various settings (silence, hedges, turns, interruptions, overlaps); address terms, non-sexist language, stereotypes
- sociolinguistics & gender: binary mindset and third gender
- *Mister* – *mistress*, *governor* – *governess*. Just suffixation, pejoration/amelioration - or telling examples of gender difference?
- African American English: theories of genesis, structure, portrayal of speakers, music and literature using AAE
- investigations into US-English: Northern Cities Vowel Shift & Southern Vowel Shift, changing or stable dialectal stratification, modern lexical input by Asian languages
- features of English-based Pidgins and Creoles, e.g. Tok Pisin (TMA, possessor-possessed, decreolization processes etc.)
- African Englishes & standardization processes
- developing a standard in Cameroon
- why study phonetics & phonology of Nigerian English
- "New Englishes"
- linguistic landscaping, here ex. from Papua New Guinea (photo SR):



## Phonetics and phonology

- Vocal fry: stylish or unhealthy? Who uses it, and why?
- Stable RP but changing monophthongs in the Queen's English?
- Are you older and /'hæpɪ/, or are you younger and /'hæpi:/? – Ongoing sound changes in RP (also CURE lowering, smoothing to monophthongs, T-voicing, Yod coalescence etc.)

- Should you vocalize your dark [ɫ]?
- vowel formants as a diagnostic feature
- ...

# DR. BEATE SEIDEL

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The following lists should only provide some basic ideas, which need to be refined for your concrete thesis projects. Other suggestions related to the given linguistic sub-disciplines are always welcome. Most of the topics require empirical work with authentic corpus data.

## **Morphology/Word formation**

e.g.

- selected patterns of English word formation (including comparative aspects with German or their historical development or their occurrence in different text types)
- stress assignment in complex words
- teaching word formation at school
- inflection of nouns, pronouns, verbs (incl. their historical development)
- morpheme types and problems of their classification

## **English syntax**

e.g.

- selected aspects of complex sentences (e.g. form, function, role of subordinate clauses; comparison of different text types)
- conjunctions as cohesive devices
- tense, aspect, voice
- subcategories of verbs

## **Contrastive linguistics (English–German)**

Comparison of various linguistic phenomena in English and German, incl. historical reasons for similarities and differences

e.g.

- constituent order in sentences
- semantic roles of subjects or objects
- tense and aspect
- non-finite clauses
- word formation types

## **Lexicography**

e.g.

- comparing dictionaries of one type or comparing selected aspects in different types
- techniques of defining words in monolingual dictionaries
- syntax, morphology, phonetics and phonology in dictionaries
- teaching dictionary skills
- problems and chances of collaborative lexicography

# NINA JULICH-WARPAKOWSKI

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## Semantics

- Conceptual metaphor
  - Your thesis may investigate the use of a particular conceptual metaphor (e.g. the KNOWING IS SEEING metaphor and its linguistic expressions – *bright, opaque, enlightenment* etc.), or the use of different conceptual metaphors for a specific topic (metaphors in music, sports, in university classes, body-based metaphors etc.).
- Conceptual metonymy
  - Your thesis may investigate the use of a particular conceptual metonymy (e.g. the INSTITUTION OF PERSON IN CHARGE metonymy and its linguistic use – e.g. *The university has decided to introduce a new degree on Cognitive Linguistics.*) or the use of conceptual metonymy for a specific topic.
- Cognitive linguistics
  - Prototype theory
  - Embodiment

Apart from that I am open to discuss other topics with you.

I am particularly happy to supervise empirical work, i.e. theses that are based on the analysis of data (e.g. corpus linguistic analyses or experimental work) and that include statistical analyses.



# JAKOB NEELS

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Thesis projects may have either an empirical orientation (i.e. data-based analysis of a particular linguistic phenomenon) or a theoretical focus (i.e. critical discussion of current issues and approaches based on a thorough literature review), although some empirical component is highly recommended, especially in theses for the MA and Staatsexamen degrees. Specific topics will be narrowed down and agreed on in consultations.

## **Language variation and change**

- the history of English (all periods, but esp. Early Modern English)
- attitudes towards linguistic variation and change (prescriptivism, standard language ideology, usage guides, dialects, sociolects, public debates, ...)
- specific (socio)linguistic developments/trends/constructions in English varieties (incl. pidgins and creoles)
- grammaticalisation, lexicalisation, pragmaticalisation
- change across the lifespan of the individual speaker
- historical sociolinguistics (e.g. the role of gender and social class)
- general theories, mechanisms and motivations of language change (incl. cognitive, pragmatic, social factors)
- ...

## **Modelling linguistic knowledge and use**

- cognitive-functional linguistics (vs. generative/formal linguistics)
- (usage-based) construction grammar
- corpus-linguistic approaches
- the idiom principle, collocations (incl. foreign language learning)
- cognitive linguistics (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, metaphor, metonymy, critical discourse analysis, ...)
- the grammar of conversation
- ...