No laughing matter: A study on teaching linguistics

May 27 2020

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A new study involving a scientific analysis of the prevalence of "LOL" in students' text messages demonstrates important potential applications for classroom learning. The study, "Linguistics in General Education: Expanding Linguistics Course Offerings through Core Competency Alignment," will be published in the June 2020 issue of the scholarly

journal *Language*.

The study's authors, Katie Welch and Marco Shappeck, highlight how their work with students conducting linguistics research at the University of North Texas at Dallas aligns with an emerging trend in [higher education](#)—one that is altering the ways in which universities determine what courses are part of the traditional canon sometimes referred to as the core curriculum." Welch and Shappeck detail how their course, The Language of Now, became adopted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as a qualifying course for the state's core curriculum. The study provides a practical framework for how [linguistic research](#) can be effectively incorporated into courses that satisfy basic educational requirements for students to graduate.

After surveying the list of approved core courses at the 170 institutions in Texas during Fall 2018, Welch and Shappeck report that linguistics comprised less than 0.1% of the offerings, even in categories where linguistics clearly fit the criteria. While these numbers are quite low, they indicate that opportunities do exist for linguistics concepts and courses to become more mainstream in higher education.

The authors' work builds on the current trend for reform of the core curriculum: while students still select their courses from broad discipline-based categories, the key difference is that now every course within a category must have the same learning objectives. Regardless of which course a [student](#) may select to fulfill the requirements of a given area, they will develop the same skillset. The common learning objectives are selected with career readiness in mind, as they are aligned with skills that employers list as desirable in job candidates—competencies like critical thinking, teamwork, data analysis and interpersonal communication.

The authors demonstrate how a key assignment from their The Language of Now course met the common learning objectives for the "Language,

Philosophy, and Culture" component area of the Texas core curriculum. This research assignment asked students to evaluate their own usage of the popular texting phrase LOL, using it as a data set that they can then analyze. After going through a series of research activities designed to help them deepen their understanding of the history and current meaning of LOL, students then made predictions about the future of this word. While this assignment content is decidedly linguistic in nature, Welch and Shappeck argue that by working through the assigned project, students also gain the highly transferrable competencies of critical thinking, inquiry, analysis, and information literacy.

  More information: Katie Welch and Marco Shappeck. Linguistics in general education: Expanding linguistics course offerings through core competency alignment. *Language* (2020). www.linguisticsociety.org/site … iles/LSA962101_0.pdf

Provided by Linguistic Society of America