Summary of Discussion:
Language Sciences Member Meeting

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Introduction

On September 16, 2019, fifty Language Sciences Members gathered to discuss long-term planning for the Language Sciences Initiative. Attendees included twenty-one faculty members, fourteen graduate students, seven postdoctoral fellows, one undergraduate student, three staff members, and one visiting scholar (as well as one donor) from six faculties and schools, and twelve departments. The topics discussed represent key areas of investment for Language Sciences programming at UBC:

- Interdisciplinary, collaborative research (e.g., new grants, collaborative workshops and symposia, and invited speakers)
- A Ph.D. program in Language Sciences
- Strategic (interdisciplinary) research areas
- Community Outreach
- Undergraduate Curriculum

These areas were identified by the LangSci Co-Directors as key priorities for LangSci as it prepares to secure long-term funding for the Language Sciences Initiative. Discussion at this event was meant to glean member input and insights into these priorities and to identify concrete next steps for LangSci as it gains institutional permanence.

Interdisciplinary, collaborative research – new grants, collaborative workshops, symposia, invited speakers

Summary

Language Sciences is a "great existing network" of scholars at UBC and other institutions. Members observed that small departments in LangSci-adjacent areas have trouble accessing resources that are readily available to larger departments; LangSci can help to provide consolidated resources shared between these departments, including in-kind support from LangSci staff. LangSci can also support linking departments to one another in order to facilitate resource sharing (of information, such as subject pools, or of equipment, such as sound booths).

Members had some suggestions for helpful information that LangSci could compile and centralize, such as a database where visitors can search for key terms related to research as well as regular meetings, events, and workshops. Some of this information

is already collected on the LangSci website; that this suggestion was made indicates that LangSci could do a better job of communicating existing website functionality to members. Likewise, members recommended that LangSci regularly publicize the availability of funding such as the Research Seed Funding (provided by the Governing Committee of Deans) and funding from the Grant for Catalyzing Research Clusters (provided by the VPRI, available to support member-led, collaborative, interdisciplinary training activities, workshops and symposia, community outreach, and knowledge translation, mobilization, and exchange).

Opportunities and support

Members suggested that the support LangSci could provide to help kickstart work in these areas (and others) include:

- Assisting in brokering corporate sponsorships;
- Hosting/supporting events like unconferences[1], where topics of talks and discussions are decided by attendees;
- Providing funding for or in-kind administrative support for events, including meetings of informal working groups;
- Hosting more frequent, casual occasions to connect LangSci researchers with one another;
- Continuing to develop our network of Ph.D. students;
- Continuing the LangSci speaker series and providing support for more thematically targeted speaker series;
- Providing funding to support visiting scholars; and
- Providing a shared, centralized space and equipment with a single point of administrative contact.

Challenges

Members outlined potential challenges to be addressed. One, mentioned earlier, is the burden of collecting and communicating information about the wide array of activities and resources available across campus and within LangScis. Members suggested a number of resources that LangSci already provides, suggesting that LangSci could work to make the availability of these resources more apparent to members. Another concern, more directly related to emerging interdisciplinary research areas that members identified earlier, is that of where this research will eventually be published. One possibility would be Frontiers in Language Sciences, which has accepted articles on topics including theoretical linguistics, language and literacy education, language and child development, and neurobiology of language. A brief survey of the past research topics covered suggests a gap in *Frontiers*' coverage of topics within

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[1] Budd, A., Dinkel, H., Corpas, M., Fuller, J. C., Rubinat, L., Devos, D. P., … Wood, N. T. (2015). Ten simple rules for organizing an unconference. *PLoS computational biology*, *11*(1), e1003905. doi:10.1371/journal.pcbi.1003905

LangSci's Language, Sustainability, and Transnationalism and Evolving Language in an Information Economy research themes.

A Ph.D. program in Language Sciences

Summary

Members outlined potential formats for a Ph.D. in Language Sciences, as well as potential drawbacks and concerns that should be acknowledge and addressed before proceeding. One such question is how a LangSci Ph.D. might be distinguished from existing departmental offerings.

Necessary Resources

Members discussed the following measures that LangSci should take and resources that it should provide to support students undertaking a four+ year course of interdisciplinary study:

- Develop core courses framed around key LangSci faculty; a first-year course focusing on guest lectures across topic fields and a mid-degree course on a main central topic (potentially team-taught) that brings together all students in the program;
- Secure buy-in from departments (such as Psychology and Linguistics) and faculties (such Education and Science), to support specific interdisciplinary streams in LangSci such as Natural Language Processing or Language Acquisition;
- Ensure students have access to relevant supervisors, sufficient core and elective courses and faculty support;
- Provide opportunities for meaningful connection and collaboration between faculty and students; and
- Provide or supplement funding for students – members noted that the typical four-year fellowship might be insufficient to support students doing interdisciplinary work and suggested that LangSci could offer supplemental funding for a fifth and possibly sixth year.

Challenges

Members identified a number of challenges LangSci must address in order to adequately support both LangSci students and existing departments.

- To develop a structured, cohesive cohort environment for students whose focuses may span a wide breadth of topics, and to connect students and avoid fragmentation within each cohort;
- To set students up to leverage an interdisciplinary degree in their postdoctoral career;
- To provide adequate support for students facing conflicting;

- To work with departments to decide how a LangSci Ph.D. should fit in with their existing programs;
- To coordinate course offerings across related departments;

Alternatives to a full Ph.D. program

Members recommended that a concentration or minor in LangSci might be a good alternative to a full Ph.D. program. Such a minor could include a sequence of 3-4 classes: one dedicated LangSci course and two-three electives from existing departments. It might also involve integrated research training and access to experience working in multiple labs. As with the Ph.D., there are drawbacks for departments and students, as students might face competing requirements from their home departments and their concentration.

Strategic Research Areas

Summary

Members outlined a number of emerging research areas at UBC that should be developed further:

- Neurobiology and neuromodeling of language;
- Collaborations with healthcare and hospitals in areas such as premature birth and cochlear implants;
- Machine learning and Indigenous languages;
- Language diversity;
- Speech technology;
- Hearing loss & speech perception;
- Language documentation, acquisition, and pedagogy;
- Comparative language sciences; and
- Natural language processing.

UBC Stakeholders in these areas include the faculties of arts, science, applied science, education, and medicine (especially clinical), as well as the Centre for Brain Health. Existing partnerships that could be leveraged further include work with certain tech companies (Amazon, Altissia Int.). Members suggested that, in the future, they'd like to see better collaboration with hospitals in BC.

Resources

Members recommended a number of resources that would be useful in supporting these initiatives:

- Faculty hires in specific areas (either full or partial);
- Field research stations, including portable neuroimaging equipment (in collaboration with CBH);

- Funding for training projects for students and postdoctoral fellows;
- Global research outposts in areas with endangered languages; and
- Administrative support staff for off-campus research support.

Community Outreach

Members discussed ways in which LangSci can support member-led community outreach efforts. LangSci could:

- Provide opportunities for members to connect with community groups and to share successful outreach strategies with one another;
- Provide funding, administrative support, and mentorship in community outreach, such as training in successful outreach strategies, how researchers can share their expertise with non-academics, and searchable online outreach resources to grow and support new connections; and
- Provide resources and benefits for community groups, such as a gateway for community groups to find us, or giving talks to classes or community groups.

Members discussed a range of topics for community outreach and other models at UBC that LangSci could emulate to pursue them. Potential audiences and community groups who might be interested in partnering on language science related projects include:

- Settlement agencies/immigrant welcoming groups;
- Communities who are revitalizing endangered languages (e.g. Stolo Nation), through documentation efforts and language classes;
- Teachers (ex. Through professional development courses);
- Parents; and
- Media.

There are a number of successful examples of community outreach activities at UBC that LangSci could build on or borrow from, including:

- Linguistics' annual hosting of the North American Linguistics Olympiad for high school students (NACLO);
- Storybooks Canada, which provides an actively-maintained resource that communities/groups benefit from;
- UBC Engineering's K-12 programming and camps that bring community into UBC and attracts future students; and
- UBC Opera's partnership with the Veterans Transition Network.

Topic Areas for Community Outreach

- Indigenous languages;
- Language diversity - potential activities might include creating materials for general audiences for raising awareness of variation (e.g. Global Englishes), tearing down ideology that only British/American English are standard;
- The neuroscience of learning another language;
- "Raising a Bilingual Child", provided in accessible languages (i.e. Mandarin, Cantonese, other commonly-spoken languages in BC)

Examples of activities on these topics include:

- Kids Take Over UBC Language Sciences – an interactive children's camp in language sciences (see Kids Take Over UBC, organized by Community Development and UTown@UBC, for programming examples across campus);
- Permanent art installations, such as through the Vancouver Mural Fest;
- Science Café – after hours events in community venues/public libraries;
- Pop-up museums – family geared events at art galleries;
- Interactive installations at places like Science World or the Museum of Vancouver;
- Presentations for community groups such as PROBUS (a retirees club); and
- Mobile apps in key content areas– content driven-social media.

Members noted that one challenge will be to track and/or measure the impact of our community outreach to validate the success of our strategies.

A Community-Based Living Language Course

The group also briefly discussed strategies for making the Living Language course (or a version of it) accessible outside UBC. Member suggested strategies such as digitizing the course via Youtube, a MOOC, or podcasts. Members noted that in order to do this effectively, LangSci must identify its target audience(s) and interests – which community does LangSci want to target, and what does that community want to know? Possibilities include parents with young families or early education professionals.

Undergraduate curriculum

Summary

Members discussed existing LangSci curriculum and how best to expand on it. Currently, LangSci offers a fourth-year course (open also to advanced third-year students), cross-listed in six faculties, with no prerequisites. The goal of the course is to explore the ubiquity and importance of language in everyday life, and for students to reflect on their own fields of study and how foundational knowledge in language sciences can impact their civic, personal, and working lives. Current learning outcomes include:

- **Identifying** the building blocks and characteristics of language and **demonstrating** how these shape the ways we think and interact with one another and our communities;
- Critically **assessing** how language is used in your chosen field of study;
- **Reflecting** on and **applying** what you have learned in your chosen field of study outside the classroom in critical and creative ways;
- **Using** your enriched understanding of how language functions to **communicate** your field's insights to broader audiences;
- **being open** to learning and listening beyond your discipline;
- **recognizing** the power of language in science and society and when it is harnessed to manipulate rather than inform; and
- **collaborating** with peers across disciplinary lines.

Growing and Expanding the 4th-year Living Language course

The group discussed ways of growing the current Living Language course. Twenty students were enrolled in the course in 2019W1. Students at this point in their programs are choosing between an interdisciplinary course versus a specialized course within their discipline.

LangSci might increase enrolment in the fourth year course through the following measures:

- Providing earlier introduction to cross-disciplinarity, possibly changing the course from fourth to second year to provide more room to build on Living Language course content (e.g. following up on the term project proposal in subsequent terms);
- Providing administrative and student advising support for cross-disciplinary courses to facilitate this type of cross-disciplinary learning / sharing;
- Having diverse students articulate and share with future students in the class what they gained;
- Advertising the course earlier in the spring term, and to more faculties;
- Reaching students earlier in their programs through their departmental advisors.

Ways of expanding the course internally and beyond one term include:

- Encouraging cross-disciplinary cohort mingling within the course to better integrate students from diverse areas;
- Increasing enrolment from outside Arts, and outside Linguistics and Speech Sciences in particular;
- Facilitating connections to allow students to carry out their proposals in partnership with group/company/researcher, such as through P.U.R.E. research funding or a directed studies course in which to complete the project with admin/academic support/structure; and
- Shifting the final project from a project proposal to a full project that can be achieved within the time frame of the course.

- Adding a second-term follow up to the 402 course (led by a single faculty member) where 402 students can complete the project they proposed in term one in a directed study type environment (with identified mentors), with a group class every week or two where students present their projects and learn from one another.

Other Potential LangSci Courses

Members suggested other courses LangSci might offer in areas of student need, including:

- A myth-debunking course for non-linguistics students to learn about language research[2]; and
- An interdisciplinary course on literacy.

Next Steps

The observations shared at this event will inform the LangSci Co-Directors, Steering Committee, and Research Leads as they develop the case for establishing long-term funding for the Language Science by providing additional substance and focus around five priorities:

- Interdisciplinary, collaborative research
- A Ph.D. program in Language Sciences
- Strategic (interdisciplinary) research areas
- Community Outreach
- Undergraduate Curriculum

In spring 2020, the LangSci Research Leads and Steering Committee are developing a proposal to become a formal Institute at UBC and secure funding as a Global Research Excellence Cluster (contingent upon the success of a SSHRC Partnership Grant submitted in 2019), based on the recommendations and priorities discussed at the September 2019 Member Event. LangSci will continue to seek member input during the proposal development process.

In addition to planning to support long-term priorities, LangSci will begin implementing short-term recommendations (increased clarity of communication of member opportunities and existing LangSci website features, for example) immediately. Additionally, LangSci invites members to contact us with ideas and questions, including regarding how we can ensure equity in opportunities for project leadership with LangSci.

To provide additional feedback on this report, or to ask questions regarding its contents, email Language Sciences at language.sciences@ubc.ca.

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[2] This gap may already be filled by the ENGL/LING 140 Challenging Language Myths course.