

Department of Linguistics



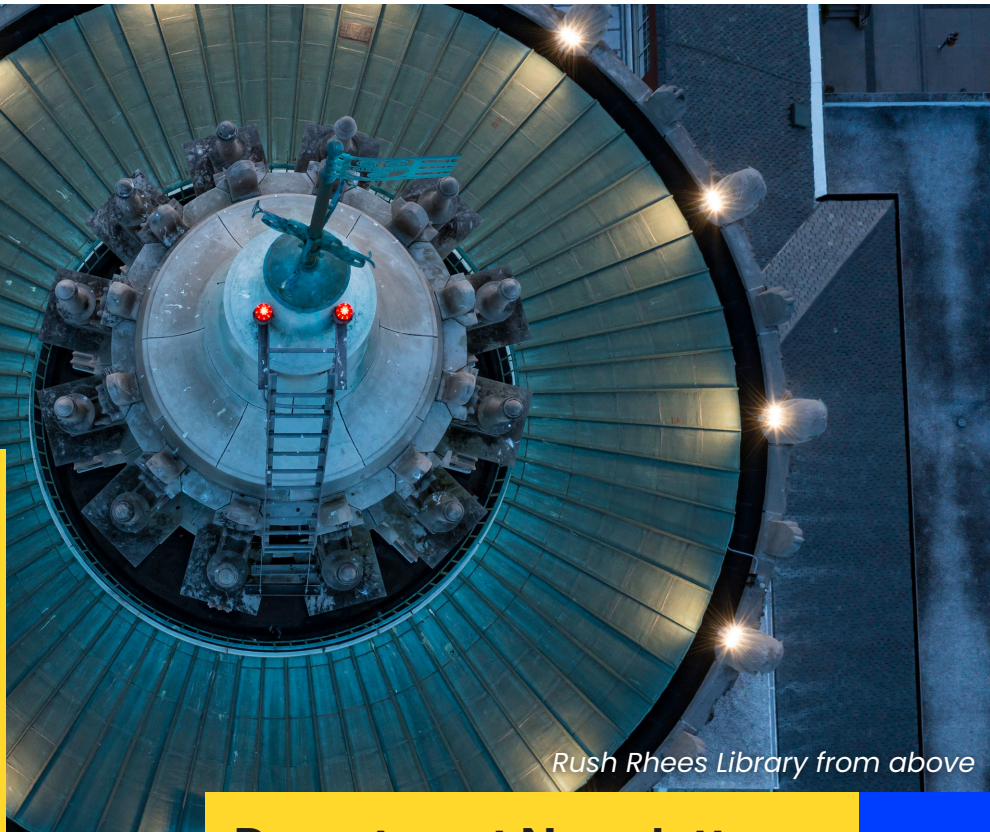
In this issue

From major research contributions to important leadership transitions and a steady slate of events, the department has continued to grow and evolve. This newsletter highlights key moments from August through December and provides updates on ongoing initiatives across our programs.

- Jeremy Coburn, featured scholar
- Transition in undergraduate leadership
- Department history discovered
- Additional news, recent events, and photos

Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations.

Edward Sapir



Rush Rhees Library from above

Department Newsletter

Volume I - Fall 2025

Jeremy Coburn, featured scholar

Visiting Assistant Professor Jeremy Coburn's work was prominently featured on the news center and featured story sections of our website and social media all semester.

His projects spanned community-centered language documentation, high-level theoretical research, and cutting-edge instrumental phonetics, giving the department a

strong and visible research footprint.

Hadza Alphabet Chart

Dr. Coburn has been working with representatives of the Hadza community in Tanzania to produce an illustrated Hadza alphabet chart designed for use in schools, cultural centers, and revitalization efforts.

The Hadza language, an endangered language isolate spoken by roughly 1,500 people around Lake Eyasi in north-central

Tanzania, has seen declining intergenerational transmission amid social and economic changes.

In 2024, representatives from major Hadza communities met for a community workshop and, together, with Dr. Coburn, agreed on a community orthography intended for literary materials and broad use in communications, publications, and media about the language.

Following community acceptance at larger meetings across the Hadza

homeland, Dr. Coburn teamed with Andrew Harvey (University of Bayreuth) and graphic designer Rahel Dires to produce an illustrated Hadza alphabet chart, displaying the language's 73 distinct sounds, including 12 click consonants, paired with example words and illustrations to aid learning and recognition. The chart was delivered to the community this August.

Contribution to a new multidisciplinary volume

Dr. Coburn's scholarship

also reached an important milestone this semester with the publication of his chapter in *The Handbook of Multilingualism, Identity, and Language Endangerment in Africa*. The chapter positions his work within broader discussions of linguistic diversity and multilingual practices, and its inclusion in a major reference volume signals the recognition his research continues to gain in the wider field.

The chapter offers the first contemporary vitality assessment of the Hadza

HADZANE TCIIYEE											
A	atibi'i		J	jala		NT	ntalantalabi'i		TCH	tchi	
AA	laalakoo		K	kamu		NTC	//intcino		TC'	tc'abako	
B	ba'alako		KH	kho'o		NTS	ntsabe'e		TL	kwatlako	
/	/inaambo		K'	k'upeko		NY	nyambululu		TLH	tlhakate	
/H	/huti		KW	kwa'i		NDZ	ndziyeko		TL'	tl'apoko	
/'	/'ama		KHW	akhwako		O	ola		TS	tsipiti	
N/	n/ata		K'W	hek'wa		OO	goyogooda		TSH	tshihaa	
D	dongoko		L	lo'o		P	pasako		TS'	ts'oko	
DZ	udzame		M	manako		PH	uphukwa		U	ukhwako	
E	enabi'i		MB	mbogooshi		P'	p'a'uu		UU	!'uu!'uko	
EE	seeta		MP	mpalama'oko		!	!oko		W	wets'a'iko	
F	fa		N	ne'eko		!H	!o!hobo		//	//ats'i	
G	goma		ND	ndagweko		!'	!'iyeko		//H	//huhiko	
GW	gwaanda		NG	ngatha		N!	n!akwako		//'	//'anako	
'	a'a		NGW	ngwilabe'e		S	seme		N//	n//obako	
H	aha		NG'	ng'aang'a		SH	shopoko		Y	yekeko	
HL	hleme		NG'W	ng'waapho		T	ta'e				
I	ishoko		NJ	njegela		TH	thaka				
II	mudiiga		NK	nkoloko		TC	tcatca				

Hadza alphabet chart showing symbols, example words, and illustrations. Created with input from Hadza community representatives by Dr. Jeremy Coburn, Andrew Harvey, and graphic designer Rahel Dires. Delivered to the Hadza community in August 2025.

language. Drawing from Dr. Coburn's fieldwork in 15 Hadza communities between 2018 and 2022, he frames his analysis using the UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment framework to identify patterns of decline and the social drivers behind them.

Clicks Beyond the Midsagittal Plane

Rounding out the semester, Dr. Coburn presented his newest methodological work: the use of 3D and 4D volumetric ultrasound to study the articulation of click consonants in Hadza.

Most previous imaging studies of clicks relied on midsagittal views, which only show a narrow slice of the tongue. Dr. Coburn's multidimensional approach reveals the full tongue surface over time and exposes patterns that earlier work simply couldn't capture.

His three-dimensional tongue surface reconstructions among dental, post-alveolar, and lateral clicks, including robust lateral asymmetry in lateral clicks—an insight that has been theorized but never visualized so directly. He also highlighted how default midsagittal alignment in imaging equipment can misrepresent the tongue's true midline, raising

methodological questions for prior studies.

Together, Dr. Coburn's community partnerships, scholarly contributions, and instrumental innovations made this a defining semester for his role in the department.

Transition in undergraduate leadership

This spring marks the end of Asia Pietraszko's impactful term as Director of Undergraduate Studies, summarized by several major curricular improvements.

Dr. Pietraszko updated the major's tracks and clusters, introduced new course titles and course sequences through a strategic restructuring of the curriculum, and initiated the proposal for our BS in Computational Linguistics.

This past July, Dr. Pietraszko was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure.

New Director of Undergraduate Studies

Starting this spring, Nadine Grimm will assume a three-year term as Director of Undergraduate Studies.

Dr. Grimm is a field linguist who specializes in language documentation, grammatical tone, African languages, and typology. She currently directs the MA

in Language Documentation and Description program and co-directs the Grammar and Variation Lab.

Earlier this year, Dr. Grimm was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure and named the James P. Wilmot Distinguished Associate Professor of Linguistics.

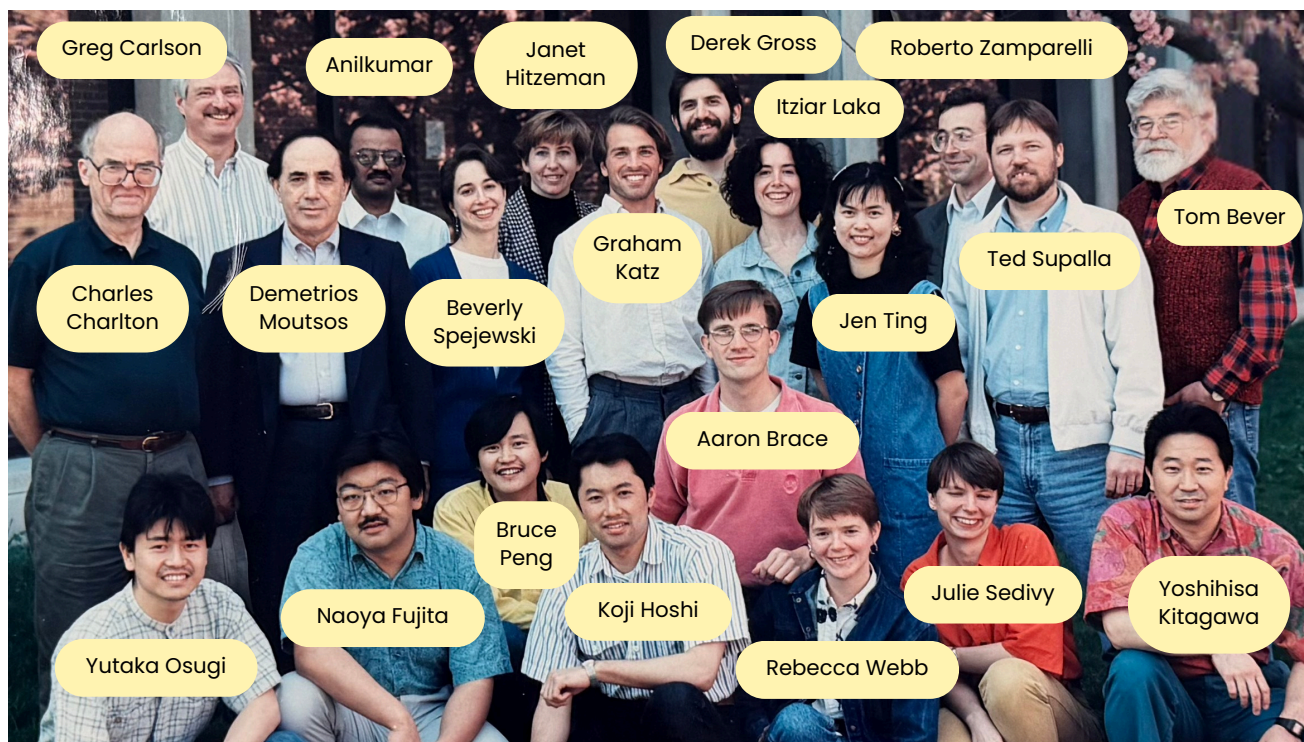
Department's origins discovered

The department has been undergoing a digital presence transformation since May, and part of that project is tied to an internal historical archive initiative.

Much of the department's history exists only in memories. Aside from the original department constitution from 1993, rediscovered recently, not much has been formally documented, leaving valuable stories, milestones, and faculty contributions at risk of being lost.

So far, building this archive has consisted of interviewing current and Emeritus faculty, compiling oral histories by capturing personal experiences, milestones, and reflections.

It's the department's intention to add chair letters to this archive—reflective letters summarizing priorities, accomplishments, and how the department evolved during a chair's tenure.



Department of Linguistics, one year before its founding, Spring of 1992, outside Dewey Hall

A Colloquium with Unexpected Historical Insight

The semester's first colloquium, delivered by Colin Phillips (University of Oxford), landed at the perfect moment to unexpectedly help us lay the groundwork for our new department historical archive.

Dr. Phillips's talk focused on his journey to Rochester 35 years ago, never having heard of language science and how what he saw in Rochester changed the course of his career.

After the colloquium, Dr. Phillips shared a marked-up copy of the 1992 department photo that hangs in our lounge, along with detailed notes about the faculty and

graduate students pictured. His recollections brought a mysterious photo of faces from long ago into focus. Dr. Phillips highlighted the people who shaped the intellectual DNA of our department, noting how foundational figures helped build the department's strengths across syntax, semantics, psycholinguistics, phonetics, and sign language research.

It was the kind of firsthand historical knowledge that rarely gets written down but matters deeply when preserving a story.

Pictured in the photo above are early members of Rochester's linguistics community, including faculty such as Greg Carlson

(semantics), Tom Bever (psycholinguistics), Itziar Laka (syntax), Ted Supalla (sign language), Yoshihisa Kitagawa (syntax and Japanese), and others who shaped the department's early years. Alongside them are PhD students who went on to distinguished careers across the globe in syntax, semantics, phonetics, psycholinguistics, and sign language research.

Many in this group became professors at universities in the U.S., Japan, Taiwan, Italy, Spain, and Canada, while others left a legacy in fields such as computation, medicine, and authorship. Together, they represent the department's foundation and its enduring international reach.

Additional News

This fall, the department saw several noteworthy developments across research, publications, and community engagement.

In August, Nadine Grimm's paper on reconstructing grammatical tone in the northwestern Bantu verb phrase was published in *Diachronica*.

In September, Mary Moroney's paper on question word distributivity was published in *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung* and C.M. Downey gave a talk titled "Fostering Grassroots Language Technology and AI" at the GIDS-AI 10th Anniversary event during Meliora Weekend.

October brought a burst of activity from both faculty and students:

- Meghna Hooda, a PhD student, gave a presentation on the discourse particle *na* in Hindi at the 4th International Conference on Discourse Pragmatics.
- Aaron White presented his work on uncertainty in lexically triggered inferences at Oxford University.
- Nadine Grimm was invited by UC Berkeley's Fieldwork Forum to talk on tone, grammar, and grammar writing.

In November, Jeff Runner was invited to a series of research meetings

in the *Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Filosófico* (SADAF) in Argentina during the month of December and the Discourse Pragmatic Variation Working Group received word that four representative projects will be presented at DiPSAL, a workshop on Discourse Particles in South Asian languages, taking place December 22–23.

In December, Jeff Runner will give a talk at the *Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Filosófico* (SADAF).

Recent Events

This semester's calendar brought a steady stream of talks that showcased the depth and range of the department's research community. We opened the semester on September 5 with a visit from Colin Phillips (University of Oxford) who presented "Now you say it, now you don't." Immediately following, we were visited by Larry Hyman (UC Berkeley) who presented on "Prosodic Domains in the Bantu Noun Phrase."

In October, the department welcomed Karlos Arregi (University of Chicago) for a colloquium on "Singular they and the syntax of townhouses."

We rounded out our colloquia of the semester with our very own Jeremy Coburn who presented on

"Clicks Beyond the Midsagittal Plane: 3D/4D Ultrasound Evidence from Hadza"

Alongside these invited talks, our omnibus lab meetings continued to give graduate students an opportunity to share developing work, field experiences, and new research.

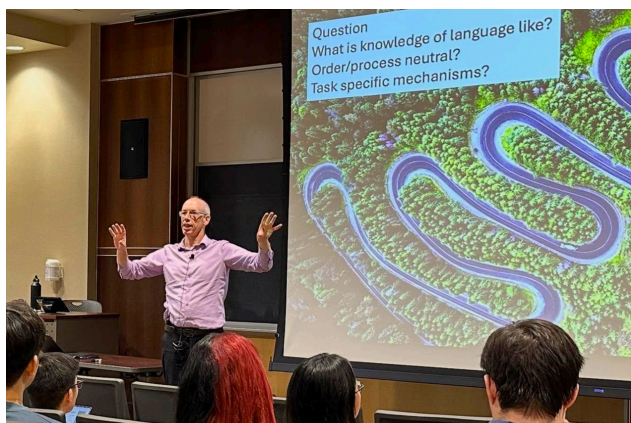
We began on September 26 with Lateef Adeleke, who discussed his recent Fieldwork in Nigeria; on October 3, Robert Chen presented his work on Applications of Language Similarity for Low-resource ASR; the month continued with Meghna Hooda's October 10 talk on the Hindi discourse particle *na*; on November 21, Danil Alekseev presented Bidirectional pattern borrowing: the case of Uzbek and Tajik and Meghna Hooda presented on the semantics of indefiniteness in Hindi; and the semester closed with Ifeoma Okoh presenting work on aya dataset and Gargi Kowli presenting on Sentential Negation in Marathi.

Together, these events created a lively intellectual rhythm throughout the fall, offering students and faculty ongoing opportunities to connect, exchange ideas, and engage with research.

Thank you for reading. This newsletter will be published at the end of each fall and spring semester.



Incoming Graduate Student Orientation, August 22, 2025



Colin Phillips colloquium, September 5, 2025



Larry Hyman colloquium, September 12, 2025



Lateef Adeleke presenting in Omnibus, September 26, 2025



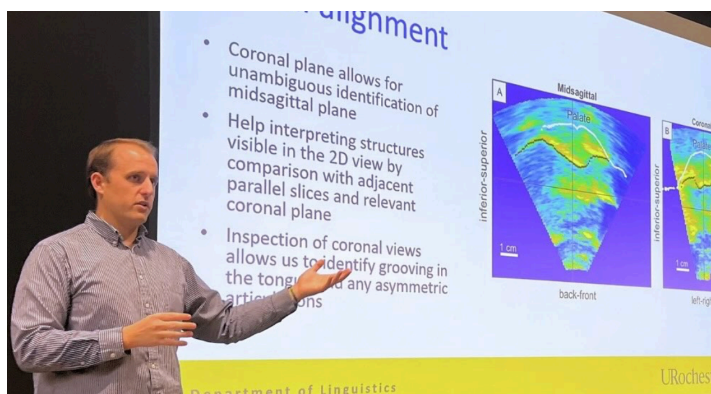
Robert Chen presenting in Omnibus, October 3, 2025



Professor J.C. Wamsley's LING 104 Language and Culture students updating the definitive University of Rochester Youth Slang Terms List using linguistics research methods.



Jillian Breithaupt, Class of 2022, PhD student at University of Hawaii visited the Grammar and Variation Lab.



Jeremy Coburn colloquium, November 14, 2025



Post-omnibus social

Department of Linguistics



Faculty & Staff



Maya R. Abtahian
Associate Professor &
Director of Graduate
Studies



Ash Asudeh
Professor



Jeremy Coburn
Visiting Assistant
Professor



C.M. Downey
Assistant Professor



Nadine Grimm
James P. Wilmot
Associate Professor



Scott Grimm
Associate Professor &
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Francis Harte
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To contribute content to our next newsletter, contact Francis Harte at francis.harte@rochester.edu.



@roclinguistics



Department of Linguistics at
the University of Rochester



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