

BROCK LING LETTER

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Table of Contents

Dr. Michael Karas
Opening Statement

New Chair of DAL

Introducing Dr. Nate
Shaftoe

Research Student Bahar

Linguistics Course
Favourites

Undergraduate Spotlight

Certificate Student
Spotlight

LingNet

Fun Fact Corner

Student Support



Brock University

Updated Professors

Kirsty Spence

Ron Thomson

Lynn Dempsey

Hillary Ganek

Michael Karas

Pelin Irgin

Nate Shaftoe

David Hayes

Thomas Farrell

MESSAGE FROM FACULTY

BY DR. MICHAEL KARAS

*A new
year,
with new
opportunities*



Welcome to the Department of Applied Linguistics (DALs) newsletter and the 2026-27 academic year. I hope everyone had a restful summer. In September, we welcome back many returning students, staff and faculty, but also extend a warm welcome to new students and faculty who are joining us this year. For DALs, it is exciting times as we welcome our new Chair and Graduate Program Director (GPD), Professor Kirsty Spence. Professor Spence joins us from the Department of Sport Management and will lead our Department through this academic year. Welcome, Professor Spence!

In this issue, you will find lots of great information about DALs' activities/achievements from the previous year and also some information about things to look forward to this year. First, we learn more about the new Chair and GPD. Then, we learn about a new professor in DALs, Professor Nate Shaftoe, and some of his recent work. Furthermore, there is a Course Spotlight section for readers to learn more about the great classes we offer in DALs. Whether you are a new or returning student, I hope you take a close look at the course offerings and choose the courses that interest/help you most. While we look forward, we also reflect on the graduating class of 2025-26 and learn about the next steps for some of our graduating students as many move on to top-level graduate programs. Finally, there is also a look back at some of the great social events that took place in 2025-26 with many events to come this year as well.

For students, staff and faculty at Brock, September always 'anchors' our year. Everything gets up and going again and campus comes to life. Thank you to our Editors for another amazing issue. Wishing everyone a happy and successful 2026-27.

OUR NEW CHAIR OF DAL

MEET DR. KIRSTY SPENCE

We had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Kirsty Spence. Hearing all about her past experiences and her future goals now working as our chair of DAL. Here is what she had to say!



1. A Bit About Dr. Spence

While Dr. Spence's academic and professional journey has taken her through several different countries, sport, teaching and learning and administration have been continuous threads through her career path. Growing up, she was heavily involved in sports, including downhill skiing every winter, softball every summer, and basketball the rest of the time. As an Undergraduate student, she pursued a Bachelor's degree in Kinesiology at McMaster University. Post-grad, her interests shifted toward sport management and education. After completing a postgraduate program in Sport Management at Durham College and a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) at the University of Toronto, she spent eight years as an elementary teacher, including roles at public and private schools in Brampton, Ontario, Moscow, Russia, and Taipei, Taiwan. Then, eight years post-graduation, Dr. Spence returned to complete a Master's degree in Sport Management at the University of Windsor before pursuing her PhD in doctoral studies at the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts (Amherst). During her second year of PhD studies, she was fortunate to be offered a position at Brock University in their growing sport management program, where she has now happily worked for more than 20 years. Dr. Spence's unconventional path has shaped an important message she shares with students: there is no single timeline for success, and each individual's academic and professional journey can look different.



2. The Most Rewarding and Challenging Parts of Her Journey

One of the most rewarding and challenging experiences of her career came during her time serving as Associate Dean in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences FAHS from 2019 to 2025, when she established the Anti-Racism Taskforce (ART) Initiative within the FAHS in 2021. The aim of the ART Initiative was to create action-based initiatives to foster greater inclusion and belonging among BIPOC-identifying students, staff, and faculty in FAHS. Through this work, she learned the importance of doing her best to embody humility and vulnerability, while remaining continuously open to learning from others. Dr. Spence has come to realize that meaningful growth often requires listening, recognizing personal biases, asking for guidance from others, and becoming comfortable with making and learning from mistakes. She aims to bring this same open-minded and collaborative approach to her new role as Chair.

3. Books, Movies, and Other Information

Her top streaming recommendation for students is Ted Lasso, a series she has watched three times! She especially enjoys the feel-good nature of the series and how the writers have integrated lessons surrounding leadership, kindness, relationships, and personal growth, all surrounded by humour, clever writing and some easter eggs! She is an avid reader of all kinds of memoirs, as she enjoys learning about other people's lived experiences. Some memorable reads have included Born a Crime by Trevor Noah, The Storyteller by Dave Grohl and Nobody's Girl by Virginia Giuffre. She also enjoys reading works by Indigenous authors like Richard Wagamese, Waubgesheg Rice and Tanya Talaga and about leadership and human development, particularly when lessons can be applied to both professional and personal life. Beyond her academic work at Brock, Dr. Spence has supported individuals as a certified Integral Master Coach™ since 2011, as they realize their desired work- and leadership-related outcomes.

4. Research Highlights

Curious to learn more? Take a deeper look into Dr. Spence's research and academic work by clicking the link below.

[Kirsty Spence, PhD – Sport Management](#)



MEET OUR **NEWEST** PROFESSOR

DR. NATE SHAFTOE

"Community Picks: Recommendations and Events"

My favourite books would have to include *The Lord of the Rings* (the fantasy epic written by a linguist and full of invented languages), *Out of the Silent Planet* (a book about a linguist who gets caught up in an impromptu journey to Mars), *Rebels Against the Future* (a non-fiction analysis of the Luddites and their opposition to early industrialization, which has remarkable parallels with ongoing debates on AI use), and the graphic novel *Superman: The Warworld Saga* (a comic book which serves as a fascinating example of how the sociolinguistic and cultural space of superheroes has evolved over the past century). For movies, I must mention *Arrival* (the movie that every linguist appreciates for focusing on a linguist, and which we also all dislike in equal measure because of how bad its understanding of linguistics is), but also the original *Stargate* and *Atlantis: the Lost Empire* (both of which also focus on a linguist and show some dubious understandings of the real science, but are otherwise excellent pulp sci-fi adventures that mostly use linguistics sensibly). For articles, as a phonologist I can highly recommend anything by John J. McCarthy, such as *The emergence of the unmarked: Optimality in prosodic morphology*, *The gradual path to cluster simplification*, and *OT constraints are categorical*.

Recent Publications, Awards, and Updates

Just last April I gave a small keynote talk at York University's GLASA Symposium, discussing my thesis "Feature-Geometric Harmonic Serialism and the RUKI Sound Law", which in essence is about trying to use a new unified model of phonology to analyze one of the most persistent issues in historical linguistics.

What is one of your favorite classes to teach?

If I had to pick a favorite course to teach, I think I would have to say LING 3P53 Phonology, though a couple others do come close. The nature and structure of 3P53 tends to incentivize engagement in both seminar and lecture more than other courses, which is always a treat to see as a Professor. I must also admit a distinct love for the subject matter itself, given that I am by specialization a phonologist!



ALUMNI UPDATE



BAHAR FOROUZANDEH: RESEARCH PROJECT



Can you tell us about your research project and what you found most interesting?

My research focuses on narrative skills in monolingual and bilingual children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). Specifically, I examine narrative artfulness, a relatively understudied dimension of narrative ability that goes beyond the structural aspects of storytelling to explore how children make their narratives engaging and expressive. I find this area particularly interesting because it offers a different perspective on children's narrative skills and has the potential to deepen our understanding of language development in both monolingual and bilingual children with DLD.



What are the challenges that you've encountered during your research?

The biggest challenge has been data collection. Recruiting families requires spending time explaining the project in detail, and many families ultimately decide not to participate. Even when they do volunteer, collecting narrative samples from children can be challenging. Working with young children always requires patience and flexibility, and because participation is entirely voluntary, it is important to create an environment where children feel comfortable and willing to engage. This has been the most demanding part of the project.

What have you found to be the most exciting part of your research?

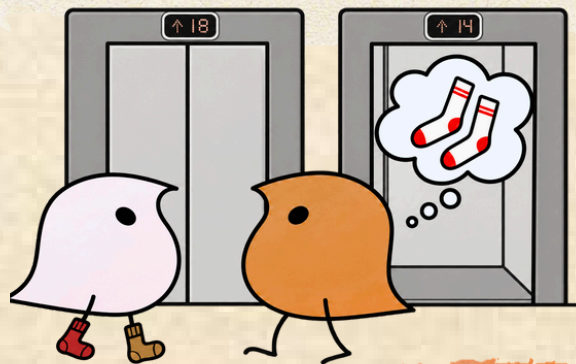
The most exciting part of my research has been the opportunity to learn. At every stage of the project, I send a draft to my supervisor, Dr. Dempsey, and she returns it with thoughtful comments and questions. Responding to those comments is where the real learning happens for me. It gives me the chance to reflect on my work, identify gaps in my understanding, and explore the literature to find answers. Each round of feedback has helped me grow as a researcher and has been one of the most rewarding aspects of the entire process.

COURSE FAVOURITES

Here you can find the most loved and highlighted courses in the Department of Linguistics

LING 1P93 - Introduction to Communication Disorders

A half credit course offered in the second semester that gives a great introduction overview for communication disorders. This introductory course paves the way for Speech and Hearing Sciences students where they learn critical appraisal of contemporary theories and research concerning atypical speech, language and hearing development and acquired disorders of speech, language and hearing. Topics included in the course are the differentiation of communication disorders from communication differences, articulation and phonological disorders, language disorders in children and adults, stuttering, and hearing loss.



LING 2P72 - Sociolinguistics

A half credit course that's offered in the first semester where you can enhance your understanding of language in social contexts. Topics include bilingualism and linguistic variation, social factors that interact with language, and cultural implications of language learning and language behaviour.

GRADUATE SPOTLIGHT

Celebrating our amazing grads and their bright futures!



*Katynda
Harrington*

1) What program were you in and why did you choose it?

My BA Honours degree was in Speech Language and Hearing Sciences. I chose this program during my second year of university when I realized I wanted to pursue a career in audiology. The program provided me with a strong foundational knowledge that will help me in my master's studies.

2) How were your 4 years at Brock?

My four years at Brock were very positive and helped me grow both academically and personally. My most memorable experiences were the hands-on learning opportunities in class.

3) What are your future plans after graduating?

I am very excited to be starting my MCISc in audiology at Western University this fall.



1) What program were you in and why did you choose it?

I was in the Speech Language and Hearing Sciences program with a concentration in the Speech and Language Sciences, and also minored in Psychology. I chose it because I wanted a more hands-on approach to my learning, which was so different compared to the other schools I applied to which were very tech-based (and it being so close to home really helped too).

2) How were your 4 years at Brock?

My four years were so much fun! My most memorable memory was my TA experience that I did in my 4th year, where I TAed the 2nd year Applied Phonetics course. It taught me so many different lessons, like how to adjust my own teaching styles, how to make discussions more engaging, and learning all about my students. We had so many good laughs and memories, and I wish I could do it all over again!



*Amelia
Wroblewski*



CERTIFICATE STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



*Adele
Yamashita-Ball*



1) What inspired you to choose the certificate program here at Brock?

Admissions to graduate programs in SLP are so competitive. I knew that if I wanted to pursue my dream career, I needed to seek out opportunities that would help me stand out and grow as a student and future clinician. The certificate program at Brock University provided exactly that. I was drawn to the program's courses and was ultimately convinced by the many opportunities available beyond the classroom. Through conversations with faculty, I discovered ways to become involved in research, volunteer at the children's center, and connect with professionals in the field. I chose the program because I wanted to build a strong foundation of knowledge, gain meaningful experiences, and prepare myself as thoroughly as possible for graduate school. I'm excited for my future studies after an intensive and rewarding academic year!

2) What are your future plans after completing the certificate program?

Now that I'm done with the certificate program, I will be starting my Master's in Speech Language Pathology at UBC this fall. Before classes begin, I'm heading out on a cross-country road trip with my partner and dog, a fitting final leg of the journey before beginning my clinical training, complete with plenty of fun kitschy roadside stops along the way.

3) Any advice you can give to current undergraduate students?

It has been a long and winding path to get here, and my advice to current undergraduate students is to be proactive in seeking opportunities that complement their education. Some of my most meaningful learning experiences happened when I was able to apply course concepts to my extracurricular activities. This helped me speak confidently about my experiences and knowledge in my statement of intent, and I think this is an invaluable part of your professional development. Finally, don't underestimate the value of making connections. Reaching out to faculty members, researchers, and clinicians can feel intimidating, but many people are genuinely willing to share their knowledge and support your growth. Those kinds of conversations will open doors to opportunities and mentorship with lasting impact.

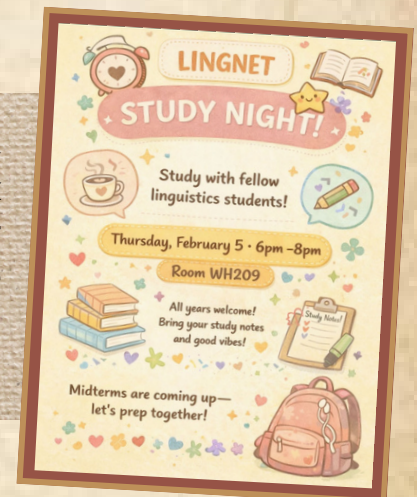
LINGNET

Did you know that the Department of Linguistics has an academic school club called LingNet? The school club is a great way to be able to interact with professors and students within the same department. Here are some of the events that were hosted in the 2025-2026 school year!



During the first semester of the 2025-2026 school year the Lingnet team worked really hard in designing speech, hearing and TESL stickers for students and staff. These stickers are a great way to design cases, laptops or sticking in a journal.

In the second semester of the 2025-2026 school year, LingNet hosted a study night for Linguistics and Brock students. The event was a great opportunity for students to connect with classmates, review course material, and prepare for their upcoming midterms together.



The final event was hosted by LingNet during the second semester of the 2025-2026 school year. With a St. Patrick's Day theme, the Bingo Night gave students a fun break from studying, with snacks and prizes to win and enjoy!

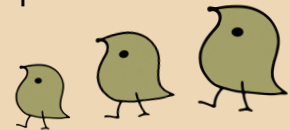


Make sure to follow the LingNet Instagram page [@linguistics_net](https://www.instagram.com/linguistics_net) to not miss out on all the fun and exciting events being hosted for the 2026-2027 school year!

LINGUISTIC FUN FACTS

1. **What is a Wug?** It's a made-up word for an imaginary bird, created by the Psycholinguist Jean Berko Gleason in 1958 for a famous experiment called The Wug Test.

Click this link to find out more about The Wug Test:
[The Wug Test: How children learn grammatical rules](#)

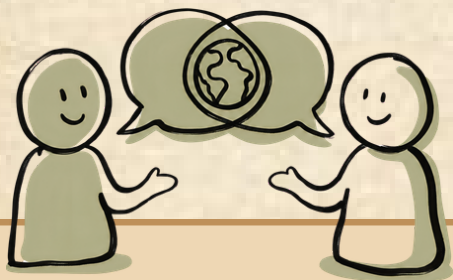


2. **Tone Languages:** In Mandarin Chinese, changing your pitch changes the entire meaning of a word. The same sound can mean "mother" or "horse" based on tone.

3. **The island of New Guinea:** Considered the most linguistically diverse place on Earth, with over 100 languages being spoken in about 300,000 square miles (which is a little bigger than the state of Texas).

4. **Largest Alphabet in the World:** The Cambodian language 'Khmer' has the most extensive alphabet in the world with 74 letters.

5. **Smallest Alphabet in the World:** The Rotokas language from Papua New Guinea has only 12 letters in their alphabet



PHONETICS FUN FACTS

1. **The phonetic alphabet** was made in order to make the teaching of foreign languages easier

2. **Expansion of the Phonetic Alphabet:** The original version could handle the sounds in French, English, and German. Later revisions added symbols for pharyngeals (e.g., [ʕ], used in Arabic, etc). Now it can handle mostly all spoken languages

3. **Used by Opera Singers:** Since they learn songs in a variety of different languages they need to become experts in pronouncing the lyrics therefore they study the IPA in order to understand the representations of the words well.

STUDENT SUPPORT

Get to know the Applied Linguistics academic advisor!



*Taylor
Shannon*

Tell us about yourself!

I am a Brock alumnus of the BA in Sociology program and the MA in Social Justice and Equity Studies program. I've been advising for 5 years. A fun fact is I did an academic exchange during my undergraduate degree and lived in Glasgow, Scotland for 9 months.

What is your favourite part about being the academic advisor of Applied Linguistics?

My favourite part of advising for Applied Linguistics is seeing the passion and enthusiasm all the students bring to the discipline. You all bring something truly special to this field.



Stay In The Know

Upcoming Auditory Research Day 2026

- **ON-EAR Research Day:** Friday December 4, 2026
- **Location:** Ted Rogers School of Management, Toronto Metropolitan University
- **Registration:** \$50 General | \$40 Trainees
Registration closes: November 4, 2026



An amazing opportunity to meet researchers, fellow students and professors while engaging in meaningful discussion in auditory research!

CONTACT US



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MEET THE EDITORIAL TEAM



Maya Leko and Malak Al-Basha