

Annual Assessment Report for 2021-2022 AY Linguistics, MA

Department/Program: Linguistics Degree MA

Assessment Coordinator: Chris Golston

1. Please list the learning outcomes you assessed this year.

GOAL 3

Objective 3.1 Critically review relevant literature theoretically and empirically.

Objective 3.2 Utilize appropriate methodology to collect data, interpret the data, and discuss theoretical implications.

2. What assignment or survey did you use to assess the outcomes and what method (criteria or rubric) did you use to evaluate the assignment? Please describe the assignment and the criteria or rubric used to evaluate the assignment in detail and, if possible, include copies of the assignment and criteria/rubric at the end of this report.

GOAL 3: Objective 3.1

Critically review relevant literature theoretically and empirically.

I used the MA theses submitted 2020-2021. There were only two of these, because an increased number of students opted to take the Comprehensive Exam rather than the MA thesis. This may have been due to a lack of faculty-student interaction during the pandemic.

For Objective 3.1 I compared the list of references in each thesis in three ways:

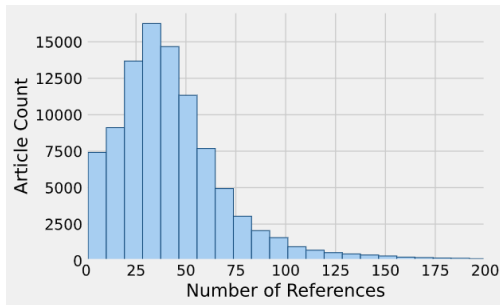
(i) *number of references*

to get an idea of how much of the literature each thesis covered

Rubric (median number, based on Choueiry 2019)

<i>Meta-Analysis</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Systematic Review</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Quasi-Experiment</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>rule-of-thumb</i>	<i>95 words of text per reference</i>

Choueiry 2019 took a random sample of 96,685 full-text research papers from PubMed Centrao, from 2016-2021. The numbers above are medians (50th percentile) for meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and quasi-experiments in the medical literature. I judged our MA theses against Quasi-Experiments, based on their scope and experimental design. Choueiry argues against using means, since the tails are so long, with some articles having over a hundred references.



(Choueiry 2019)

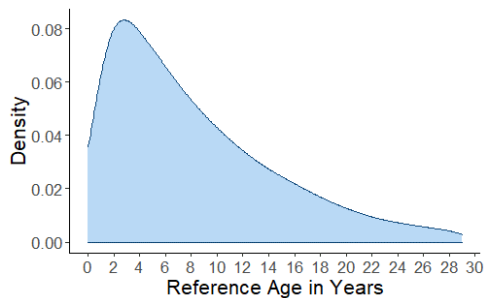
(ii) currency of references

to get an idea of how current the literature was that each thesis covered

Rubric (median number, based on Choueiry 2019)

median age of reference 7 years

Choueiry 2019 took the same random sample of 96,685 papers from PubMed Central, from 2016-2021 and again used median age.



(Choueiry 2019)

(iii) length of paper

to get an idea of how lean or wordy each thesis is

Rubric (median number, based on Choueiry 2019)

median length 4100 words

Choueiry 2019 took a smaller random sample of 61,519 full-text research papers, again from PubMed Central between 2016 and 2021.

GOAL 3: Objective 3.2

Utilize appropriate methodology to collect data, interpret the data, and discuss theoretical implications.

For Objective 3.2, I used the same two MA theses. This part of the assessment is necessarily more qualitative than the preceding, as there are no published methods for evaluating collection, interpretation, and evaluation of data.

(i) review of data collection

to get an idea of the experimental methods used to collect data
criteria:

(ii) review of data interpretation

to get an idea of the qualitative and quantitative methods used to interpret data
criteria:

(iii) review of theoretical implications

to get an idea of the theoretical results of each thesis
criteria:

3. What did you learn from your analysis of the data? Please include sample size (how many students were evaluated) and indicate how many students (number or percentage instead of a median or mean) were designated as proficient. Also indicate your benchmark (e.g. 80% of students will be designated as proficient or higher) and indicate the number of students who met that benchmark.

*Sample size = 2 MA theses (total submitted last year, unfortunately)
50% were deemed proficient. Our Benchmark is 80%, but this is a sample of only 2.*

GOAL 3: Objective 3.1

Critically review relevant literature theoretically and empirically.

(i) number of references

Thesis 1: 27 references *not proficient*

Thesis 2: 41 references *proficient*

Benchmark: 39 references

Given a medical science benchmark, one thesis has too few references and the other is fine. This suggests that we might tell students that about 40 references is a good goal.

Choueiry's rule-of-thumb of roughly *100 words of text per reference* can be interpreted as a wordiness target: more than 100 words of text per reference is likely wordier than needed. On this score both theses do poorly. Thesis 1 has 4700 words of text and 27 references, or 174 words of text per reference; one interpretation of this is that the style is almost twice as wordy as published research in the medical sciences; Choueiry's results are about 44 references for an article this length. Thesis 2 fares much worse in this regard, with 15,000 words and 41 references, or 365 words per reference, more than three times wordier than the rule-of-thumb.

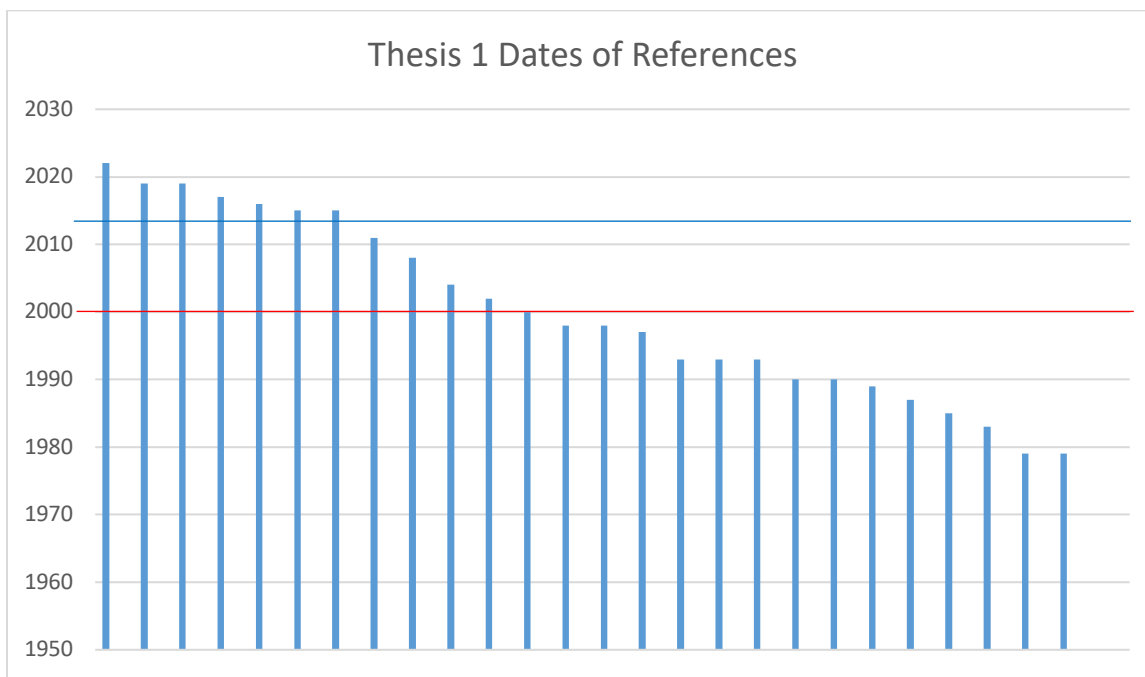
This suggests that our theses might be longer than they need to be, given what they cover. The journal *Nature* allows no research articles above 9000 words and it's the most lenient of the science journals; *Science* allows no research articles about 4500 words; *Pediatrics*

sets the cap at 3000 words. Our Thesis 1 was 4700 words, which seems ok, but our Thesis 2 was over 15,000 words, which seems to me hard to justify unless we aim for writing in the humanities and not writing in the sciences, which I doubt we want to do.

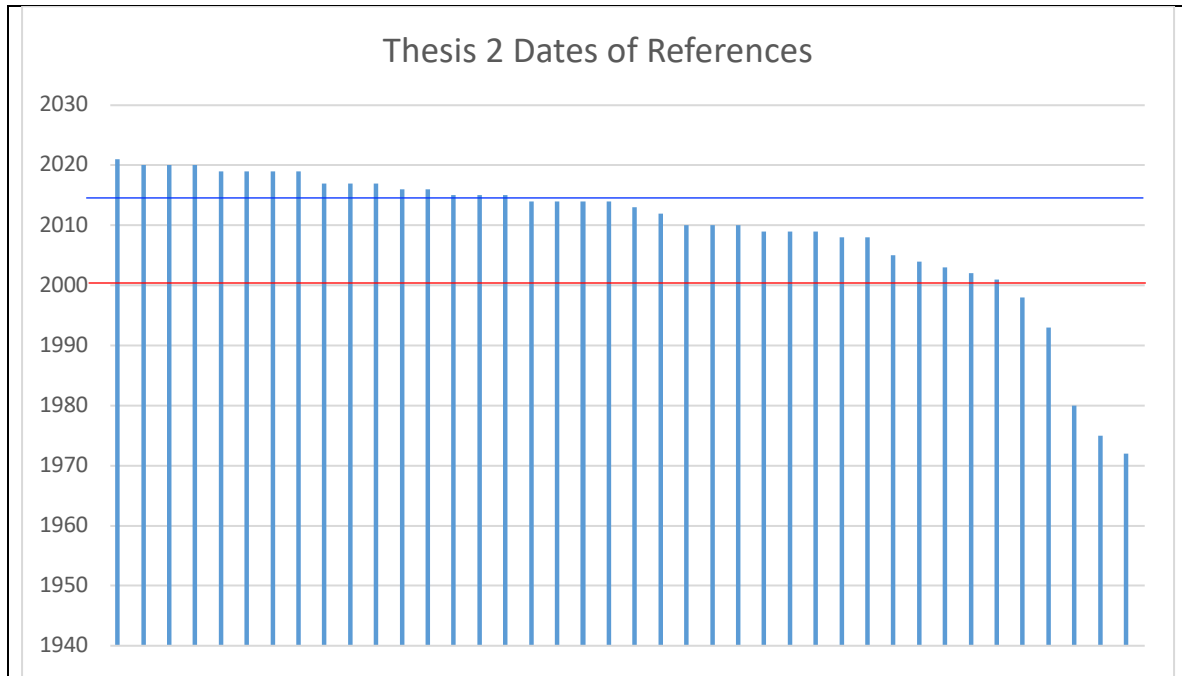
(ii) dates of references (avg.)

Thesis 1: 22 years *not proficient*
Thesis 2: 13 years *not proficient*
Benchmark: 7 years

Again, our theses fail here if judged by scientific standards of published research. As shown below, all but 7 of the references in Thesis 1 are > 7 years (blue line), and over half are > 20 years (red line):



Thesis 2 is much more current, but still falls well below the median age of 7 years:



I take this as evidence that we need to push our students towards more current research, with a less historical bent.

GOAL 3: Objective 3.2
*Utilize appropriate methodology to collect data,
 interpret the data, and discuss theoretical implications.*

(i) review of data collection

*Thesis 1 collected **native speaker data** from the author, a speaker of Qarni Arabic*

- (i) 20 words with stress on the rightmost heavy syllable*
- (ii) 10 words with stress on the leftmost light syllable*

Thesis 2 used a survey and an experiment

- (i) a **survey** on sentence interpretation
 15 L1 English speakers, 13 Japanese English learners*
- (ii) a perception **experiment**
 57 L1 English speakers, 30 Japanese English learners*

All three types of data collection (native speaker, survey, experiment) are standard in their respective fields of theoretical phonology and experimental syntax.

(ii) review of data interpretation

Thesis 1 used a constraint-based model to interpret the data, helping predict what types of stress system should and should not occur.

Thesis 2 used various kinds of statistical packages for the survey data and phonetic and statistical software for the experimental data.

Both types of interpretation are standard in their respective fields of theoretical phonology and experimental syntax.

(iii) review of theoretical implications

Thesis 1 concluded that previous attempts to explain the typology of two types of stress system (default-to-same and default-to-opposite) were insufficient and proposed a new constraint the addition of which is claimed to predict all and only the attested types of stress system with respect to the same/opposite difference. If true, this is an impressive theoretical implication.

Thesis 2 found that native and non-native speakers of English prefer narrow scope readings even when prosodic and visual factors disfavor them, showing that the scopal properties are robust and unaffected by written vs. audio vs. video modality. It also found that increased exposure to English can shift Japanese narrow scope preference to the less extreme version favored in English.

Both theses engage the current literature on an impressive level, as their results have significant implications for what is currently known.

4. What changes, if any, do you recommend based on the assessment data?

The results from Objective 3.1 suggest that to better emulate the sciences, we should

- (i) nudge up the number of references per MA thesis*
- (ii) crank up the currency of references in MA theses*
- (iii) crank down the overall length of MA theses*

The results from Objective 3.2 suggest that we're doing ok on teaching students how to do Linguistics, with respect to collecting and analyzing data, and with respect to seeing what the results mean in terms of literature.

The trick will be to continue doing well in 3.2 while improving how our students do in 3.1.

5. If you recommended any changes in your response to Question 4 in your 2020-21 assessment report, what progress have you made in implementing these changes? If you

did not recommend making any changes in last year's report please write N/A as your answer to this question.

N/A

6. What assessment activities will you be conducting during AY 2022-23?

We'll be looking at our Comprehensive Exam, with respect to how well students do on

Goal 1: Knowledge of How Language Works.

Goal 2: Effective skills in the analysis of linguistic data.

Reference:

Choueiry, George. 2019. How many references to use for research papers?

<https://quantifyinghealth.com/how-many-references-to-use-for-research-papers/>