Linguistics is the scientific study of human language. A growing and exciting field, it has links to a diverse range of others, including psychology, philosophy, neuroscience, cognitive science, computer science, artificial intelligence, sociology, language teaching, anthropology, and education.

Linguists work to understand the structures and social uses of human language at all levels. Questions about linguistic structures and cognitive structures include: How do children learn to speak? How is language represented in the mind? What do all languages, including sign languages, have in common? How is language different from the communication systems used by whales, bees, and chimpanzees? What linguistic information do computers need in order for us to converse with them? What are the neurological tie-ins of language disorders such as aphasia or Williams Syndrome, and what can such impairments tell us about the brain mechanisms for language? These scientific and technological questions lead us to ask other questions about language and society: How might we think about linguistic controversies, including debates about official languages, Black English, gender bias, and bilingualism in education? Linguistics attempts to answer each of these questions and covers a surprisingly broad range of topics related to language and communication. And cutting-edge work in cognitive science investigates how natural languages are acquired and processed. Computational linguists apply linguistic theory to build all of the applications that we use that interface with language: grammar checkers, translation programs, search engines, browsers, voice recognition, and speech synthesis. To work in a field that involves language in any way, you will need to know how language works, the core of the field of linguistics.

Linguistics at Northeastern offers courses examining the structure of language (such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics), the sociocultural nature of language (such as language and culture, language and gender, and sociolinguistics), and applied fields (such as language acquisition, language change, and historical linguistics).

Students can pursue a major in linguistics or one of a number of combined majors, including linguistics and psychology, linguistics and cultural anthropology, linguistics and English, linguistics and communication studies, computer science and linguistics, data science and linguistics, American Sign Language (ASL) and linguistics, and linguistics and speech-language pathology and audiology. A minor in linguistics is also available.

Linguistics offers a variety of co-ops, including positions at local and national companies involved in speech recognition and production, as well as at Northeastern's own language processing and language acquisition labs in the Department of Psychology. Linguistics majors can also participate in international co-ops—for example, working with researchers at the University of Kaiserslautern in Germany.