

MA thesis supervision

Jamie Findlay

About me

I am first and foremost a **theoretical/formal** linguist. This means I work on making sense of messy linguistic data using **mathematical** and **computational** tools.

The big picture

If you intend to approach it from a formal perspective, I am happy to supervise almost **any** area of linguistics. Below are some of my specific interests, but I absolutely love hearing about/brainstorming project ideas from totally new areas as well. So just get in touch!

Syntax, semantics, and the interface between them

My “day-to-day” research involves syntactic and semantic analysis within constraint-based and logic-driven frameworks.

- **LFG:** Lexical Functional Grammar and its architecture.
- **Glue Semantics:** Resource-sensitive approaches to meaning.
- **Argument structure:** How are the semantic arguments of verbs realised syntactically, and how can this vary both across and within languages (including e.g. voice alternations like passive)?
- **Theory comparison:** Assessing competing models (e.g. LFG and Construction Grammar).

Grammar engineering and computational linguistics

I am an “old-school” computational linguist in that I am interested in using computers to implement and test linguistic theories. But I am also increasingly interested in finding out what (if anything) modern large language models (LLMs) can tell us about language.

- **Grammar engineering:** Building and testing computational grammars (especially in XLE/LFG – come and take LING4170 for some hands on experience with that!).
- **LLM probing:** Investigating what kinds of linguistic knowledge LLMs encode (note, this is different from merely assessing/evaluating LLMs; that is an engineering, not a scientific, task).

Social meaning

I am interested in sociolinguistics, but mostly in sociolinguistic *theory*, and especially how we can model aspects of Penelope Eckert’s “third wave” with the tools of formal semantics and pragmatics.

- **Gender & sexuality:** How is language used to construct and police gendered identities? What is the relationship between language and desire? (*The love that dare not speak its name* . . .)
- **Affect and compositionality:** How do affective expressions like swear words, slurs, honorifics, etc. interact with the traditional notion of semantic compositionality?

Idioms and multiword expressions

An evergreen interest of mine is how linguistic theory should handle idioms and other fixed expressions. How non-compositional are they really? How much of their form and/or meaning is stored and how much is processed online? What can “literary”/“poetic” language tell us about language in general?