Bachelor's

Sign Language Linguistics

uva.nl/ba-sign-language
In the Bachelor’s Sign Language Linguistics you explore the structure, acquisition, and use of sign languages from the perspective of a linguist. As part of the programme, you will also learn and study Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT).

Top 5 reasons to study Sign Language Linguistics at UvA

- The Linguistics programme at UvA is ranked first in Continental Europe on the QS ranking by Subject.
- The University of Amsterdam is one of very few universities in the world that offers a fully-fledged track in Linguistics with a focus on visual-gestural languages.
- As a student of Sign Language Linguistics at the UvA, you will acquire and study Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT).
- Students who already know another sign language are encouraged to bring their knowledge of this language into the programme.
- As a track of the Linguistics programme, you will be studying various subfields of Linguistics, allowing you to make your own choices regarding your future trajectory within this field of study.
- Amsterdam has a thriving community of signers of NGT with many social activities.
Study programme

The first year
The first year is designed to introduce you to basic linguistic concepts, and how these can be applied to sign languages. Simultaneously, you acquire Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT), which you will be able to use in your other courses, as you will frequently be asked to come up with NGT examples to further illustrate phenomena that are discussed in class. You will also be learning practical skills that are important for a sign language linguist, such as transcribing and annotating sign language data.

Second and third year
In the second and third year, you will become acquainted with two research traditions in (sign language) linguistics. One of these traditions focuses on theorising about the structure of language. The other tradition observes linguistic behaviour in real-life situations, as well as in experiments. Accordingly, you take courses on linguistic structure and linguistic behaviour, and courses that combine both traditions, such as the course Psycholinguistics of Sign Languages. You will study linguistic structure (of both spoken and signed languages) in courses such as:

• Phonology and Morphology of Sign Languages
• Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics
• Lexicon and Syntax of Sign Languages
• Linguistic Theories

You will conclude the programme by writing a Bachelor’s thesis, your first major piece of independent research.

Livia Faverey, Student

‘In high school, I combined the Nature and Technology and Nature and Health profiles. I studied dentistry for a year, but after participating in Sign Language Linguistics as a ‘Student for a day’, I decided to switch. Sign Language Linguistics gives you a different perspective on the position of minority groups and their languages. You learn to develop your own view of the world and minorities in particular.’

‘My plan now is to combine the two: Oral Hygiene and Sign Language. I want to become an orthodontist and open my own practice where multiple languages are spoken: Sign language as well as different spoken languages. A multicultural practice that is also accessible for deaf people. They won’t have to claim reimbursement for interpreters because I will speak their language!’
Career prospects

A completed Bachelor's programme in Sign Language Linguistics offers a wide range of career prospects. Graduates find jobs in the field of sign language linguistics and deaf education, but also opt for other positions that require a critical, independent, and analytical mind in combination with good language skills. Jobs that our alumni have found their way to include:

- Scientific researcher in sign language linguistics;
- Advisor for services in deaf education;
- Developer of course materials on sign language;
- Positions at deaf schools and hospitals;
- Social worker at institutions that supply support for deaf clients with psychological or social problems.

'I teach most of the theory courses in the Sign Linguistics programme. Comparing different languages – be they signed or spoken – fascinates me. Where do they show structural similarities, and where do they differ? I’m also interested in language change: changes in the grammar and the lexicon of a language. For sign languages, this is not easily investigated, as there are no historical sources. Sign languages are not written down, and therefore everything we know about them is fairly recent. To study Sign Linguistics, you should have an interest in language and be a communicative person. Analytical skills are important, too, because linguists sometimes take a rather theoretical approach to studying language. It may well be possible to learn and analyse a language on your own, but sign languages are very interactive. Eye contact and facial expressions are important, so you shouldn’t be shy.'
Master's programmes

The Bachelor's degree certificate Sign Language Linguistics can offer admission to the following Master's programmes:

1-year Master's (60 EC)
• General Linguistics (track: Sign Linguistics)

1,5-year Dual Master's (90 EC)
• Nederlands als tweede taal en meertaligheid
• Redacteur/editor
• Journalistiek en media

2-year Research Master's (120 EC)
• Linguistics
• Brain and cognitive sciences

For entry requirements to these Master's programmes, please visit: uva.nl/master.

Anique Schüller, alumna:

'I was enrolled in another degree programme when I suddenly went deaf. Fortunately, I realised that I could learn sign language in combination with studying linguistics.'

'Thanks to my thesis group and my thesis supervisor, I have great memories of working on my thesis. This period was very positive for my personal development. I was working with data from the corpus of Sign Language of the Netherlands, and after finishing my thesis, I was offered a job as Research Assistant in the corpus project. I first joined a project that was done in collaboration with the University of London. Later I participated in an EEG project that studied the cognitive skills of deaf native sign language users.'
Visit us

Make sure you are well-prepared before the start of your studies at the University of Amsterdam. Visit an Open Day, schedule a Campus Visit, and make sure you are well-informed about the programme. Please see: uva.nl/international