



UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

# Graduation handbook (Scriptiehandleiding) BA Linguistics and BA Sign Language Linguistics

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## 1. General information

This document provides information about the **three components** of the BA thesis. The final grade for your thesis is a weighted average of:

- a **scientific thesis** of approximately 6,000 to 9,000 words (70%), assessed by its content and development; see Section 2.
- a **poster presentation** during week 10 (10%); see Section 3.
- a **popular paper**, perhaps in the format of a newspaper article or of a newspaper interview with yourself, of approximately 800 words (20%^); the assessment is based on your supervisor's editing and comments; see Section 4.

**Entry requirements.** In principle, the BA thesis is the final subject within the BA programme. It builds on knowledge acquired during all previous courses you took in the BA Linguistics or the BA Sign Linguistics, including the Specialization course.

If you passed or started too few courses by the start of the thesis trajectory, the thesis coordinator may instruct you to continue your thesis trajectory in the following year.

**Set-up.** During the course *Specialization Linguistics*, you developed your research question, you discussed your methodology, and you already read and presented published work that is crucial to your topic. Whereas in the specialization course you worked in a group of 5 to 10 students, you now divide up into smaller thesis groups of approximately three people. Your thesis group meets once a week for two hours with your thesis supervisor.

**Individual work versus group work.** Although many students will work individually on a question that they would personally like to see answered, there is also the possibility that multiple students within a thesis group write their theses on the same data (and perhaps even share the same research question): bundling efforts may ease e.g. the collection of large datasets for typological research or the recruitment of large numbers of participants for psycholinguistic experiments. Students are allowed to do group work under the condition that they still write separate theses and popular papers and present separate posters; all grading will be separate. In cases of joint topics like this, the criterion of originality tends to become hard to assess, as ideas are likely to have been developed jointly within the thesis group; it is therefore expected that any publication of the material is done under the authorship of all students involved (as well as that of the teacher).

**Supervisor.** Your BA thesis will be supervised by a teacher. Your thesis supervisor is not necessarily the teacher of your specialization course; the allocation of teachers depends on expertise and on the goal of equal distribution of students over groups. In all cases, the supervisor will be a teacher from the Linguistics programme.

**Amount of work.** The BA thesis is valued at 12 EC. As a EC is nominally 28 hours of work, your thesis could take up  $12 \times 28 = 336$  hours of work. Your supervisor is paid 15 hours to supervise a BA thesis.

**Language.** All components of the BA thesis in Linguistics are written in English.

**Canvas site.** The BA thesis has its own Canvas site (<https://canvas.uva.nl/courses/13640>).

## 2. Scientific thesis

### 2.1 General information

A BA thesis is a short treatise on a well-defined problem or subject, which in our case must lie within the field of linguistics. It is written in a form similar to that used for a scientific article. The scientific thesis contains a maximum of 6,000 to 9,000 words, excluding the title page, the list of references, and any appendices. The scientific thesis makes up **70% of the final grade**.

**Work flow.** During the course, you submit partial versions of your thesis. As in years 1 and 2, block 5 again consists of nine weeks (nevertheless numbered 1 to 8), of which approximately five days are holidays (this is the situation in 2020; it will change in 2021, when there will be a vacation week in the middle of block 5). There are eight group meetings. You start writing your thesis immediately, and you proceed in the order familiar from the First Year Group Project: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion. Each part is commented on by your supervisor as it takes shape; to make this procedure efficient, any changes in earlier submitted parts of the thesis should be rendered clearly visible to the supervisor, for instance by using Track Changes in Microsoft Word. In block 6 (weeks 9 through 12), there is one last meeting with your thesis group, one public poster presentation (see Section 3), one individual meeting with your supervisor, and the final exam with the supervisor (and in some cases the second reader).

**Second reader.** Your scientific BA thesis is not only evaluated by your supervisor, but also by a second reader, whom you choose in consultation with your supervisor. Typically, the second reader reads only the final version.

**Exam and grade.** The final grade is determined by the supervisor in consultation with the second reader. During the last meeting, which takes place in week 12 at the end of June, the assessment is discussed and you receive a report on how the grade was established. The supervisor takes into account the whole project: the start of the research, the writing process, and the processing of teacher instructions and corrections. The second reader may choose to be present at the last meeting and may then question you about your work; in that case, the supervisor and second reader will set the grade at the end of the meeting.

**Submitting the thesis.** You are expected to submit the final version of your thesis, including attachments, via Canvas, where it will be automatically checked for plagiarism. You have to submit the final version (no later than 20 June 2020) as a PDF file, so that the layout is fixed (i.e., not as a Word file, the layout of which depends on the recipient's computer and available fonts).

The thesis should contain a summary in English (max. 250 words). You are encouraged to also submit this summary for publication in the *KATblad*, such that your research gains visibility ([katblad.uva@gmail.com](mailto:katblad.uva@gmail.com)); alternatively, you may choose to submit your popular paper to the *KATblad* (see Section 4).

**Re-sit.** If your thesis is assessed as unsatisfactory, you will have the opportunity to submit a revised version of the scientific thesis and/or the popular paper by October 15 of the following academic year, so that the supervisor can issue a new grade by October 31 (you will need to be enrolled at the UvA at that time). The poster presentation cannot be resat, and its original grade will still count for 10%. In case the revised version(s) of scientific thesis and/or popular paper are not submitted within this period, or still do not meet the requirements, you will need to register for a new workgroup in the following academic year and write a new thesis about a different subject.

**Archiving.** When you submit the thesis on Canvas, it will automatically be archived on UvA Theses Online.

## **2.2 Types of theses**

There are different types of research projects that may lie at the basis of a Linguistics thesis. The following is a list of possible types. Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

### ***(i) Report of a small empirical study***

Some random examples of topics for an empirical thesis are: a study of gender attribution to nouns by second-language learners; a study of variation in language use depending on region or age; a phonological analysis of the expressions of a two-year-old child; an analysis of the spoken component in Sign Language of the Netherlands.

### ***(ii) Comparison of different theoretical positions***

Some random examples of topics for a theoretical thesis are: a discussion of different views on the concept of ‘classifier’ in sign languages and spoken languages; a comparison of models for working memory and language; a comparison of different views on the analysis of reflexive structures; a comparison of general characteristics of *Optimality Theory* versus *Harmonic Grammar*.

### ***(iii) Discussion of some language data in the light of one or more theories***

Some random examples of topics for an analytical thesis are: a description of nominalizations in different languages within the framework of *Functional Discourse Grammar*; the derivation of a perception grammar for how Polish derives words from French; a syntactic analysis of interrogatives in sign languages within the framework of *Generative Grammar*; a description of rhetorical questions in Japanese within the framework of conversational analysis.

### ***(iv) Critical review of the literature on a particular topic***

Some random examples of topics for a literature review are: the relationship between pidginization and second language acquisition; the acquisition of fingerspelling by deaf children.

Combinations of the above types of thesis are common. An empirical investigation will usually be motivated by the different predictions made by different theories, and a literature overview usually cannot be done without a comparison of the theories underlying the research presented in the publications under scrutiny.

## 2.3 Evaluation

The scientific thesis is assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Scientific quality: clarity of the question, research method, quality of argumentation, description–analysis ratio: 40%.
2. Handling of sources and materials: selection of primary and secondary literature, quantity and quality of sources used, quotations and literature references, accuracy: 20%.
3. Creativity, originality, depth, and difficulty: 10%.
4. Structure and line of argumentation: division into chapters, paragraphs and subparagraphs; means of achieving coherence: 10%.
5. Language proficiency and style: 10%.
6. Self-reliance, progress (including learning from supervisor’s comments), independence: 10%.
7. Appearance, layout: the conditions of Section 2.4 must be met.
8. Length, number of words: the conditions of Section 1 must be met.

## 2.4 Notes on conventions and formatting

Details regarding conventions and formatting will be discussed in the thesis group, as different supervisors may have slightly different preferences; moreover, there is some room for individual variation. Below, we offer some general information.

**Title page.** The title page should contain the following information: (i) title of thesis; (ii) name of student and student number; (iii) “BA thesis Linguistics / BA thesis Sign Language Linguistics”; (iv) “University of Amsterdam”; (v) name of the supervisor; (vi) date of the version.

**Abstract page.** The second page of the thesis should contain a summary in English (max. 250 words).

**Layout.** Page format is A4; margins on each side at least 2 cm; line spacing 1.5 lines or Multiple 1.2; new paragraphs indented (i.e., no empty lines separating paragraphs). The text is divided into chapters and sections with numbered headings. All headings appear in the table of contents with (starting) page numbers.

**Examples.** Examples have to be numbered. Formatting of examples should respect the usual guidelines, that is, Leipzig Glossing Rules for spoken language examples (<https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>) and the general glossing conventions for sign language examples. For examples that you source from the literature, you need to provide a source reference including page number.

**Tables and figures.** Tables and figures have to be numbered, and these numbers should be used in the text. Both need to have informative captions. Captions are often in a somewhat smaller font and appear *above* tables but *below* figures.

**References.** In linguistic theses, references are generally provided in the running text in between parentheses; e.g., “(Miller 1969; Brown 1984)” (websites, however, can be provided in footnotes). All references mentioned in the text must be listed in the bibliography. You can use any complete and consistent format for the presentation of references in the bibliography. Some examples are the “Unified style sheet for linguistics” (<https://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/unified-style-sheet>) and APA, but you may be inspired by the conventions in any linguistics journal.

### **3. Poster presentation**

In week 10 (e.g. Friday 12 June 2020), you present your scientific thesis in the form of a poster at the BA poster festival. Content and layout of the poster are discussed in the thesis group. As a general guideline, a poster should be clear to the linguistic audience, bring the major scientific point across, be appealing to the eye, and not contain too much text. At the poster festival, you are expected to stand next to your poster and to be prepared to summarize its content for the visitors. The poster makes up **10% of the final grade**.

### **4. Popular paper**

In addition to the scientific thesis, you summarize your main findings in the form of a popular paper, that is, a text targeting a lay audience. This popular paper could be in the form of a newspaper article, of a newspaper interview with yourself, a video, or any appropriate means of communication; if written, it should have a length of approximately 800 words.

You hand in your popular paper in week 12. The assessment criteria are the clarity for your intended audience, your success in getting your scientific point across to that audience, and your success in keeping the intended reader interested throughout the work. Your supervisor provides feedback to you by sending you an edited version of your text as well as some separate comments. The popular paper counts for **20% of the final grade**.

You are encouraged to submit to the KATBlad either your popular paper, or the abstract from your scientific thesis.