

Department of Linguistics, University of Toronto
Response to SSHRC's Renewed Program Architecture

The proposed program architecture renewal evoked mixed reactions among linguists in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Toronto. We consider that the Standard Research Grant program is essential to independent research and scholarship in Canada, and thus are following the proposed changes closely. We have five main comments, as presented below.

1) The move to separate new and established research programs, and to simplify the complexity of the current Strategic Research Grants programming, is a welcome one.

2) The proposed adjudication process for Research Development Grants is felt to be disastrous, in that it involves a serious move away from true peer review. In addition, the shift to academically unmotivated, cross-disciplinary committee constitutions, with a reduction of members with expertise in Linguistics and Translation, is also felt to be extremely problematic. The combination of these two changes is alarming. Surely this is not a change that answers any expressed dissatisfaction among the academic community. We elaborate on this below, then we suggest an alternative.

We find the committee constituency placing Linguistics with Education, Psychology and Social Work to be unmotivated by any academic measure. These areas are not even in the same faculty in most universities. Expertise is already stretched within the current committee makeup of Linguistics, Applied Linguistics and Translation, which includes research ranging from laboratory-based studies in neurolinguistics and phonetics to fieldwork and contemplative studies in the philosophy of meaning. The proposal to include fewer linguists in the adjudication panel, and to merge them with others from unrelated disciplines, is an alarming step backwards for our discipline and for SSHRC procedures.

The proposal to not include external reviewers for the Research Development Grants will disadvantage new scholars in that they will not receive valuable feedback from scholars situated squarely within their areas. In addition, committee adjudicators rely heavily on external expertise in evaluating projects.

We suggest a compromise: either the proposed mixed committee reviews Development Grants but each grant proposal undergoes a peer review system including two external reviews, or we retain the current adjudication committee of Linguistics, Applied Linguistics and Translation, and abolish the external reviews for Development Grants. As outlined above, we consider that eliminating sound review practices in each of these areas constitutes an unacceptable weakening of the review system. (See also point 4.)

3) We are concerned that with respect to the Research Grant competition, unless more funds become available, the higher ceiling for funding requests will create a feast or famine situation for Canadian researchers. Potentially, even with the longer timeline for research proposals, the available funds could be exhausted by only two or three grants, especially in the context of a field that is becoming more experimental and laboratory-based. The situation is already deplorable, with only (approximately) 20% of proposals funded, and it seems likely that the proposed changes will worsen the situation, given the competition for funds across the various grant-types.

4) The difference in evaluation between the two programs is problematic, as the scope of the projects within the two programs can overlap. In other words, there could be a \$100,000 grant in Research Development for three years, and a \$100,000 grant in Research Grants for three years, yet the two would receive very different review processes.

5) We emphatically favour maintaining a strong focus on track record for established scholars. Moving from 60% (Standard Research Grants: Record of Research Achievement) to 20% (Research Grants: Capacity (the expertise to succeed)) is too extreme.