Episode #4: Wendy Jacinto

URL: https://www.linguisticscareercast.com/podcast/episode-4-wendy-jacinto/

Laurel Sutton: Hello, and welcome to another Linguistics Careercast, the podcast devoted to exploring careers for linguists outside academia. I'm your host, Laurel Sutton. Our interview today is with Wendy Jacinto. Wendy was an exchange student in Germany during high school, which deepened her interest in language. She went on to study linguistics and graduated with a PhD in Sociolinguistics from the University of Washington in 2015. Her research was on language mixing, particularly in the Spanish-English and Turkish-German bilingual communities. After graduating, she worked in Translation and Interpretation Project management in healthcare settings for six years. She is currently a Linguistic Services Consultant at Acrolinx, a content improvement platform. Topics we'll cover today include sociolinguistics, phonetics, healthcare work, translation, interpretation, whether or not you should get a PhD, and financial concerns around grad school. And now, here's the interview.

I would like to welcome our guest today, who is Wendy. And Wendy is another person that I met through last year's Linguistics Career Launch and saw that she was an enthusiastic participant and has since gone on to have some very interesting career stuff happen. So Wendy, welcome to our show.

Wendy Jacinto: Thank you.

Laurel Sutton: So as with most people, I would like to start by asking you about your education as a linguist. What were your degrees? Where did you study? What was most interesting to you as you were choosing the parts that you wanted to focus on as a linguist in school?

Wendy Jacinto: So, I did an undergraduate degree in international service, and I hadn't heard of linguistics at that point. But I did find myself more interested in classes on language, you know, foreign language classes, as opposed to the classes on politics or economics, which was kind of the bulk of what we were studying. I actually didn't learn about linguistics until after graduating, and at that point, I was back home in Portland, Oregon, and so I signed up for a few classes at a local university, an intro to linguistics class, and one on language development in children, and so just to kind of test it out and see if it really was something that I wanted to pursue. And I really loved those classes. So at that point, I applied to some master's programs and ended up going to the University of Washington in Seattle. And so I continued on through for a doctorate in sociolinguistics at the University of Washington.

Laurel Sutton: Did you know from the beginning you wanted to do socio or did you take a bunch of classes and then decide that that was what was turning you on?

Wendy Jacinto: I didn't, you know, so… And since, you know, going into the master's, I didn't have the background from an undergraduate education, besides the two intro classes that I had taken, so it was during the first, it was a two-year master's, and so during the first year, I took the classes in all the different fields. And that's how I kind of narrowed it down to sociolinguistics. I did concentrate on both socio and phonetics. I was really interested in multilingualism, and so looking at code-switching and how that happens, both, you know, on the social side and how it varies across cultures and individuals, and then also phonetic variables related to that.

Laurel Sutton: We have that in common, because I did the same thing. And it's funny when I tell people that, they're… I think they're a little surprised because those things seem like they're at opposite ends of the spectrum. Because…

Wendy Jacinto: Oh, really?

Laurel Sutton: Well, phonetics is so data-based, and precise and scientific in some ways, whereas sociolinguistics, and this is the perception of sociolinguistics, is that it's very squishy, and that it's not science-y. And I think when you do sociolinguistics, of course, you find out it is because you're looking at tons and tons of data and trying to draw conclusions from that. But my experience and from other people that I've heard is that at universities, socio tends to be something that people think is as far away from quote-unquote “real linguistics” as possible. And that's terrible.

Wendy Jacinto: I can see that too. But of course, you know, when you're even starting out in the introductory classes and looking at variationist sociolinguistics, and reading about Labov, it all starts with phonetics.

Laurel Sutton: Yeah.

Wendy Jacinto: And then, you know, you branch out. That's what really interested me.

Laurel Sutton: It's funny too, that most of the people I've talked to said that they didn't know about linguistics, they took some linguistics courses, and it was sort of a love at first sight sort of thing, where you took this class, and you're like, “Oh, this is what I want to do. This is the thing.” That was completely the case for me too, that it was just something that grabbed you right away, thinking that you could now start to analyze language in this very insightful way, which is just totally different from any other major that, or classes that I had had, certainly, as an undergrad.

Wendy Jacinto: Definitely. Yeah.

Laurel Sutton: So you worked while you were at school. I'm just looking at your LinkedIn profile here. When did you kind of think to yourself, “Okay, maybe academia isn't for me, and I need to look outside of this”?

Wendy Jacinto: You know, I'm not sure that I ever was… I don't think there was ever a point where I was certain that I would stay in academia. I kind of entered already thinking of it as a, you know, “This is something I really enjoy studying,” and I was fortunate enough to be able to complete the degree without acquiring loans because of TAships and scholarships. And so while you're not earning a lot of money as a graduate student, if you can get through without going into debt, it's almost like you're being paid to learn. And so I did look into kind of areas that, or, you know, universities that were recruiting for tenure-track positions when I was close to graduating, and I did send out some applications, but it was always kind of in the back of my mind that, you know, I'm probably not going to end up as a professor. And part of that was, I don't feel like I have the temperament to get through the kind of cutthroat competitive field of, you know, getting to that point where you're the one chosen out of hundreds, and also, I wasn't necessarily prepared to just drop everything and move to where the jobs are, right? So there are… And there are a few universities in the Pacific Northwest, and, you know, they were not hiring at that, you know, at the point when I graduated, and it really wasn't very likely that that would happen anytime soon.

Laurel Sutton: So what was the support like in your department as far as types of jobs you were applying for or career paths?

Wendy Jacinto: To be honest, I'm not sure that I spoke with my advisors or professors in great detail about jobs. So they did… You know, I'd kind of talked about possibilities of, you know, what I might be interested in the future, but I didn't look to them necessarily for advice on how to find… when they, they were aware that I wasn't necessarily 100% committed to finding an academic career and didn't push, but also didn't inquire too much further. And so I… But I did, we did have a, you know, pretty active list, I guess a listserv for the students in the department, and so sometimes people would post when there was someone recruiting for something related to language, a lot of times language teaching jobs or someone who had graduated from the department and went on to industry, and they would, you know, email the department. So that was really openly shared and definitely not discouraged to look into that. And that's how I ended up finding my first job outside of school. In fact, I think that I started there before I graduated with a doctorate.

Laurel Sutton: Okay. So that job opportunity came through the listserv specifically?

Wendy Jacinto: Yeah, it was someone who had been in the department and was working at a local organization that did translation and localization for health research surveys. So the patient reported outcomes surveys, and they were hiring a new translation coordinator. And so she reached out and I think she herself had found out about it from the network within the university. So I went there and joined a group of graduates of the department and worked on localization of healthcare forms.

Laurel Sutton: So it was a bunch of linguists all working together?

Wendy Jacinto: There were… Well, there were at least four of us that had been in the department. And so it wasn't, you know, it was not a formal relationship, but it was networking. Yeah. We knew each other from there. And the others were people who had a background in interpretation or translation services.

Laurel Sutton: Oh, how interesting. Just shows you the importance of networking and also those alum connections, right? Because the people who graduate and then get these jobs are usually very eager to sort of pay it back to the department and hire those folks that they know are going to be smart and capable and ready for work. This is something, you know, most linguists in industry will say that they are very happy to offer a hand to people who are still in school and who might be graduating. So the importance of those networks really can't be overstated, I don't think.

Wendy Jacinto: Right. And the organization, the company also really leans on their employees to reach out to those connections when they're recruiting.

Laurel Sutton: Okay. So you worked there for a while, and then what was next for you after that?

Wendy Jacinto: Yeah. So that was, you know, I worked there for a few years in, in Seattle directly after graduating, but I had moved there… My husband and I moved to Seattle from Portland, Oregon, in order for me to pursue the degree and had always intended to return to Portland. And so it kind of had my eye out for an opportunity to do that. And after I was at Health Research Associates for a few years, I saw an opportunity that really fit kind of what I was doing currently, as well as, you know, my interest in returning back to the Portland area. And it was a translation and interpreter services coordinator at Kaiser Permanente. So the headquarters for the Northwest region is based in Portland, and they were hiring for someone to coordinate all of the language access efforts for this region, and so that brought me back down here.

Laurel Sutton: And I'm noting that the job title does not have the word “linguist” in it anywhere.

Wendy Jacinto: No.

Laurel Sutton: So for you looking at this job and being a linguist, how did you decide that it was a good fit and that your linguistic skills would be the thing that got you the job?

Wendy Jacinto: I think that what was really beneficial at that point was where I was at, you know, at the moment where I was working to coordinate translation projects for HRA. And so I had the background in translation coordination and working with, you know, translation software. They were looking to kind of standardize the efforts on translation of documents for the organization. And then I didn't have specific experience in the interpretation side, but having the background in linguistics and, you know, having experience working with native speakers of many different languages kind of bridged that gap. And it was also an interesting opportunity to learn about another side of language access to add kind of to the repertoire.

Laurel Sutton: What do you think in that job and maybe in the one that you had before it, what do you think was most useful from your academic studies of linguistics? Obviously, the multi-language skill is super important, but aside from that, what other things do you call on to be the best you can be there?

Wendy Jacinto: So at the point when I was applying to those jobs, I'm not sure that I… I think I was looking at it as a kind of settling because I knew that I wasn't really going into academia, and I wasn't really going to move far from the Pacific Northwest, and so I looked for anything that felt kind of linguistics-adjacent to me. And so, you know, things working with language, they were fun. I loved the people that I was working with and getting to know new fields, but I didn't necessarily see the direct correlation between what I was studying and what I was working on. And I think that I… I would talk about the experience that I had teaching language. I was teaching Spanish at the University of Washington, and so that helped in terms of, you know, when you're managing the work of translators or, you know, product management, a lot of the skills that you develop as a teacher kind of cross over. But I wasn't necessarily seeing the link between what I had studied to what I was working on. And then it wasn't until, you know, some of the conversations that took place when I took part in the Linguistics Career Launch last year and talked about ways that companies are looking for in employees really relates to the skills that we develop as students and specifically graduate students of linguistics, that I was able to really put that more into words, you know. And so even though I wasn't using, say, the same software tools that I did in school, the fact that I was learning new software, and that's something that you do as a student and things like that, that kind of crossed over.

Laurel Sutton: I think that's something that gets glossed over sometimes when talking about the skills you learn as a linguist, as you were just saying, things like project management or even workflow or things like, you know, organizational skills, because all of that stuff is what you have to do when you're doing linguistics, right? Like you've got data, you have to organize it, you have to set up taxonomies, things like that. And those skills are essential just about for every job that you're going to have that involves language or even just managing other people or managing projects. And I think as linguists, we get very good training doing that, but it's not something that you think of as linguistic training, but it is very much linguistic training. So let's see. So you worked at Kaiser and you were there for a while. What was the scope of your work? Like describe a typical day or a typical week as you were there, what you did.

Wendy Jacinto: So we worked on, we had various different kind of, our hands in different areas of the organization. My boss and I were the only two people working with language services for the entire region. So anything that came in related to translation or interpretation would go through us. A lot of it was coordinating of contracted vendors. So we used vendors for all of the written translations, and then we used vendors for interpreters that would go to appointments and also for phone and video interpreters. A lot of what we did in the last year that I was there was to roll out video interpretation services, because at least in our region, we did not have a strong program in place. And when COVID restrictions hit and we could not have extra people in the room, there was a really urgent need to get access to interpretive services in the room at, you know, when people are having a medical appointment or at the hospital. And so we were, I worked with the vendor to roll out, it was almost 500 machines, to the clinics around, you know, from Southwest Washington down through Oregon, and to train staff on how to use them and, you know, make sure that they were there ready to deploy when someone needed to see the doctor.

Laurel Sutton: Did you get promoted while you were there or were you basically in the same position?

Wendy Jacinto: I was in the same position the whole time. Yeah. So outside of the role that I was in and, you know, the role that my manager has, there was not another position that I was attracted to within the healthcare field. You know, if I had been specifically interested in project management, I could have gone that direction. If I was specifically interested in healthcare administration, I could have, but what I really enjoyed about the role was working with language. And, you know, although I learned a lot about kind of how a healthcare system works and learned about a lot about my local community and where, you know, by visiting all of these different neighborhood clinics, there wasn't specific room for growth in the area that I was working.

Laurel Sutton: And did that contribute to you wanting to move to somewhere else? I mean, not out of Portland.

Wendy Jacinto: Yeah, no, it did. I was happy in the role. I enjoyed what I was doing, and there were always new challenges to learn. And I think the reason why I hadn't looked outside of there at that point was, again, you know, kind of those assumptions that there wasn't anything that was specifically, you know, linguistics-related that I could do in Portland. And again, I was really affected by changes due to the COVID pandemic because everyone got sent home. So I was working remotely, and it took a while into that situation for it really to occur to me that this could actually open doors because I could look for opportunities at companies that were not local and continue to live here and to work from home, but look for something that might more closely match what I had studied and what I was kind of interested in.

Laurel Sutton: You're there, you decide that you want to start looking for something else. How did the next part happen to the position that you have now?

Wendy Jacinto: So about… Actually, almost exactly the same time that I started searching around online for opportunities to work remotely, I came across an ad for the Linguistics Career Launch on LinkedIn. And it was at a time where I had even, you know, I had spoken with my manager about taking some time off of work to dedicate towards a job search so that I could actually, you know, not try to just kind of fit in an hour or two at night, but actually to put some time during the days to really do some concerted efforts towards, you know, learning more about what was out there and what I needed to do to be ready to apply. And so I used that time and attended the sessions in the Linguistics Career Launch over the course of a month and did that concurrently with sending out applications. So I was able to, you know, send an application and then kind of debrief, you know, in real time with someone who was working in industry and get feedback on what did they think about, you know, the interview questions or offer negotiation and things like that.

Laurel Sutton: So what was the most valuable thing, do you think, that you got out of the Linguistics Career Launch? Was there like one session in particular that stands out or, or somebody that you talked to specifically?

Wendy Jacinto: In general, it was the, that kind of sense of community because it almost felt like I was in a cohort. It was also, it kind of coincided with a, you know, the time when I was not going to work on a daily basis. I worked really closely with my manager and we were kind of constantly connected, but outside of that, it was almost like I'm working at home by myself, and having this kind of group that I would come to every day or every other day and kind of share thoughts with, it almost felt like I was in a class where we were going through, you know, we were going to graduate together, right? And having that real-time conversation and the, you know, Slack channel and, and things like that, it really made a big difference. And then having the people be available for those, you know, those kinds of networking events. Someone who was really helpful in listening to, you know, fielding questions and giving personal advice was Hadas Kotek. Yeah, I met with her a few times and even brought a specific, specific questions coming out of an interview. And I even, you know, had a job offer and kind of, I said, “Can I talk to you real quick? And what do you think?” You know, and being able to throw that, these really specific questions that you might not necessarily feel comfortable posting online or bringing to a professional contact. That was really helpful to be able to talk through.

Laurel Sutton: Do you feel like the Career Launch really expanded your network?

Wendy Jacinto: Oh, definitely. Probably exponentially. It would be interesting to see if you could see on LinkedIn, you know, on LinkedIn specifically, a count of how many connections you have before and afterwards, but I'm sure you would see a really sharp rise.

Laurel Sutton: That is really great to hear. So you took all this information, and how did your current job opportunity come to you?

Wendy Jacinto: Deb Walker is actually a, I think that she's a member of the SIG, the Special Interest Group for Linguists on Academia, right? And she came and spoke… I don't think she did a formal presentation, but she joined some of the networking events, and she spoke about her position at Acrolinx. And she's been here, I think about four years, but she has a long career outside of academia in localization and then also working at Microsoft.

Laurel Sutton: Yes.

Wendy Jacinto: And she spoke about her current role as the favorite one, her favorite one that she's had. Right? And she really spoke in glowing terms about the culture of the organization and how much she loves working here. So I kind of, I had it on my list of, I had a list of people that I wanted to do informational interviews with, and before I actually sent her the invitation to ask for an informational interview, she shared a posting online for the linguistic services consultant, and her team was hiring. And so I reached out and said, you know, “I've been wanting to kind of talk to you to ask some more about what your day-to-day work is like. Do you have time?” And she was totally available for that. And then I applied based on that.

Laurel Sutton: So, networking.

Wendy Jacinto: Oh, yes.

Laurel Sutton: Oh, that's great. So Deb's a linguist. She might be one of the people that we end up talking to. And she has absolutely been part of a lot of the Linguistics Beyond Academia SIG events over the years. Her work has been sort of adjacent to mine. So my work is doing naming and branding, and a lot of the work that she did at Microsoft was not so much localization as cultural appropriateness testing. So making sure that names and words and colors and images were going to be appropriate for the global audience. And sometimes it was testing names that had been created by a naming company, for example. So she and I have known each other professionally for a long time because our work kind of flows into each other.

Wendy Jacinto: Right.

Laurel Sutton: So now what is your day like at Acrolinx? What do you do there?

Wendy Jacinto: So my so my daily schedule has changed a lot since I started. So I started in January, and it's been almost six months. And the first few months really were a lot of training and onboarding activities. I was really impressed with the amount of training videos that they had prepared. They have presentations and activities that they put together for new linguistic services consultants. And so a lot of that was kind of self-directed, but then we would meet regularly with the more senior consultants to go over questions, to review our progress, and things like that. And then over the next few months, there was kind of a transition to, you know, shadowing the senior consultants when they were meeting, you know, training customers or meeting with customers. And then now, I would say my day is mostly divided between meetings with customers, which are training them on how to use our software and how to best, you know, kind of modify the program to meet the needs for their content, and then computer work, self-directed, which is mostly, you know, email communications and then responding to help tickets online and then customizing the settings for an individual customer for how Acrolinx will be reading their content.

Laurel Sutton: So for people who don't know, like what does the Acrolinx software do? Is it translation software?

Wendy Jacinto: I was like, “I should have started with that.”

Laurel Sutton: Yeah. Yeah. Tell us. Tell us about it.

Wendy Jacinto: So Acrolinx is a linguistic engine which analyzes written text. So it's looking not just at the spelling and grammar, but it's looking at style and consistency. So, it works as a plug-in into different authoring tools that will give writers feedback on their content and ways that they can implement. They can improve the content based on their company style guide, and then in general metrics about clarity and consistency and things like that. And then it also has the administrative dashboard online, which is a view for administrators to see analytics of how many checks are being run, the word count and then the details of which words are being highlighted as issues and which ones are being acted upon and things like that so that they can kind of optimize it to best meet the needs of the content.

Laurel Sutton: Is it in English only or are there other languages?

Wendy Jacinto: There are other languages. It's actually a German company, so it's primarily available in German and English. However, I, located on the West Coast of the United States, am working entirely with customers that are in the United States and don't have any customers that use other languages.

Laurel Sutton: Let's just talk about linguistics. So now you're in this job. What parts of your linguistic training do you think are most important for what you're doing right now?

Wendy Jacinto: So I think in general, it's kind of the general understanding of language, you know, parts of speech, morphemes, the way that, you know, how words are inflected and also how to kind of break that down and explain it to customers when they're trying to find how they can turn their style guides into really measurable goals and guidelines. So a lot of that is just kind of the basic understanding of language. And then also, I mean, again, it kind of brings in experience as a language teacher and an intro to linguistics teacher. We also have a concentration, there's a goal that has been added recently to the software, which works on inclusive language, and so I think that the background in sociolinguistics helps there. And so, you know, it's definitely a… It's flexible to meet the needs of the customers, right? So different customers will implement their inclusive language goals in a different, in different ways, right? So the way that it looks for one customer might be different from another one. If we're talking about gender-neutral language, there might be, for standardization, they might encourage the use of singular “they” rather than “he” and “she,” or they might say, “Let's use s/he.” I have a customer right now who is wanting to use, to rewrite the sentence to use plural so that you don't, you know, rather than using one of the other options, but kind of talking about the reasons for, you know, writing more inclusively and then, you know, understanding the ways that language content can be exclusive. I think that having the background in linguistics and specifically sociolinguistics definitely helps in that area.

Laurel Sutton: That's a huge part of it, right? I mean, from my work in sociolinguistics, a lot of it just comes down to power differentials (right?) and how that gets expressed through language, and even if you don't mean it to be exclusive, it is anyway.

Wendy Jacinto: Right.

Laurel Sutton: So, you know, your intent doesn't matter. It's really the language that you use and how it's being perceived by your target audience. And in business, that's really important, because you don't want to put off potential paying customers because your language isn't inclusive enough.

Wendy Jacinto: And I think that there's, it seems like that there's a growing understanding of the importance of that, but each individual that you're speaking with who is, you know, an administrator or a writer of content might not necessarily know how to turn that into, you know, a goal or have necessarily a real specific understanding of how it relates to their content.

Laurel Sutton: Well, it sounds like you're using both of those things that we started off by talking about the sociolinguistics, but the phonetics also.

Wendy Jacinto: Well, phonetics…

Laurel Sutton: In terms of just breaking the language down to little bits and pieces, right?

Wendy Jacinto: Right. Yeah. This is all, it's all written content. So it would be, you know, so I do kind of feel like there’s the, miss the… You know, so it is… All the spelling and things like that are different. It's a different kind of application. So I do kind of miss the, you know, working on recordings of language and looking at sound files, but, but I see what you mean about just kind of breaking it down into the smallest building blocks.

Laurel Sutton: So you've been there for like six months. Do you feel like this is going to be a good home for you for a while?

Wendy Jacinto: I do. Yeah. And I think that has a lot to do not only with the specific role, but also the company culture and just the people that I'm working with, because even though it's completely remote and I'm not working with anyone in Portland, I have felt from the very beginning like I'm part of a group, and I'm communicating with teammates, you know, throughout the day. I don't have a day where I am just working on my computer by myself. And the atmosphere, you know, if you can say, quote, “atmosphere,” kind of work atmosphere, it's just very, very welcoming. Right? And even talking to people in other countries who are working in different roles, it's just been really easy to kind of connect with people and to find out about what their job entails and things like that.

Laurel Sutton: Here's a question for you. So Deb, as I said, I've known her for a long time. She has a BA in linguistics. On your team of other linguists, do you feel like there are a lot of people with master’s, most people with PhDs, do you see a breakdown there at all? Or does Acrolinx care?

Wendy Jacinto: I don't know. I know that a PhD is not required. And I know that… So when I was hired — just a few months before I was hired, they hired two new consultants, and of those two, one has a master's in linguistics, and the other has a background in content editing, in terms of… I'm not sure if it was journalism or communications background. But I think that they're very, you know, they look to have that kind of a diverse makeup of the field because there is the side of it that is about, you know, managing content online, and, you know, kind of AP style guide and Chicago style guide and implementing those kinds of things, and it really helps to have a background in that, and then to complement that with staff who have the more formal linguistics training.

Laurel Sutton: It's a question that comes up a lot. And I know at the Linguistics Career Launch, we spent quite a bit of time talking about that because for a lot of people who are coming to the end of their master's, the question always is, “Are you going to go on to the PhD?” And I think the answer is, “It depends.”

Wendy Jacinto: Right.

Laurel Sutton: Right? I was thinking just now about what you were saying at the beginning of our conversation about not having to graduate with a huge amount of debt, which I think is kind of unusual for people who are getting their PhDs, because it's a lot, right? So from your experience in working and seeing the types of people that get hired at places like Kaiser or at Acrolinx, what is your own personal opinion about the MA versus the PhD?

Wendy Jacinto: That is a very hard question. Like you were saying, I think that it… The answer is, it depends. If you were coming out of a bachelor's or coming out of an MA, and you knew that this was the type of job you wanted to look to look for was something in industry with, you know, a linguistic application, I don't think you need the PhD. I think that… I don't regret pursuing it, and a lot of that is because, you know, I enjoyed it so much and because I was able to go through, again, without a lot of financial debt, and was able to, you know, have teaching positions throughout and have fellowships, language fellowships and things like that. I also feel like I learned more about these different… You know, I didn't learn about industry necessarily, but learned about, you know, we used the programming software R for doing statistics. I don't think I used that as a master's student, and definitely not in undergrad. You know, and I was able to use, in some of my courses in grad school, I used different discourse analysis tools and concordances and things like that, which I was not exposed to earlier on, but I have met people who have a master's and do have experience with that. So yeah, I think it really, it really depends.

Laurel Sutton: I'm glad that, you know, we've talked a little bit about the financial part of it, because I think it's something that you can't overlook, and it's something that you're kind of not supposed to talk about in grad school, right? Like, we're all supposed to pretend that everybody's cool financially, and that's often not the case. People are often in very different situations. There are some folks who, they come from wealth, so they don't, it doesn't matter to them. There are other folks who do get scholarships or teaching positions, so they generally are able to hold it together. And then there are people who they go into huge amounts of debt to get that degree. So I think looking at the employment situation, people who are in programs shouldn't feel like they have to continue with that PhD if it's going to be such a hardship that you end up, you know, leaving grad school with a PhD, but also with $200,000 in debt, which is very possible for people to rack up if you're going to an R1 institution.

Wendy Jacinto: Right. I think that's a very big consideration, right? And even if you do go on to a tenure-track position, you'll still be paying that off for years to come.

Laurel Sutton: Yeah. It's like so many weird things about academia. You're not supposed to talk about it, like it's not part of your life, you know. Talking about money is for the little people.

Wendy Jacinto: Right, exactly.

Laurel Sutton: We're on a rarefied plane where money's not supposed to play into it. But on the other hand, you need to eat, and you need to be able to support yourself.

Wendy Jacinto: Yeah. Well, we definitely talked about it. You know, we would definitely share, you know, scholarship opportunities, fellowship opportunities and things like that. But I think beyond that, I can't recall conversations about, you know, “Okay, so this TAship is covering your tuition. How are you, what are you doing to pay the rent and the food budget?” Right? That wasn't really talked about.

Laurel Sutton: And then for you, the career that you've had so far, I think I would be right in saying that you're probably making far more now in industry than you would as an academic, given your experience and your training and the fact that you really like what you do also, you know, huge bonus there.

Wendy Jacinto: Yeah. Yeah. I am now. The first one coming out of graduate school actually was not a high salary. It was, you know, above what I was making as a grad student. But that was considered a halftime job, you know, as with the fellowship. And, you know, but it has brought me… Each move has brought the salary higher, and I think that being able to really find kind of target companies that I was really interested in and that would put the experience more to use made a difference there as well.

Laurel Sutton: It's, again, it's not a thing that people often talk about, but that we need to be really aware of that switching jobs is okay (right?) and that this is the way you gain experience and you don't need to stick with one job forever. Chances are you're going to have a lot of different jobs and you view that as a gain in experience, a gain in salary. If you stay within a company, you should be looking for a promotion. And again, versus most academic jobs where now anyway, there are so many places that have salary freezes and the potential to increase your earning power just doesn't exist maybe the way it used to, I don't know, 20 or 30 years ago. So it's a mind shift in what you expect to get as an employee, right? That you get opportunities, you get benefits, and if it's not a great fit for you, get a different job. They're out there. And it's, as you said at the beginning too, looking for a job is a job, but it's the one that gets you where you want to go and then opens the path for things that come later on.

Wendy Jacinto: Yeah. And it's always scary to take that jump and go somewhere that you don't know. Even moving to, working for a company that is almost completely remote, it was scary because there's almost this feeling of “Is this real?” I used to go to an office, and while I wasn't by the end of my last job, I knew where their headquarters are, I've met people in person, and starting a job that's completely virtual for me was scary. And I think that in a part, it was kind of like, “Okay, the computer came in the mail. I know that that's real.” And that's where networking makes a big difference too, because having created those connections and talking with people who have other shared connections and that feeling of reality really made it easier.

Laurel Sutton: Is there anything, any kind of piece of advice that you wish somebody had given to you as you were embarking on your career journey that you'd like to now pass along to the folks who are listening?

Wendy Jacinto: The knowledge that there are jobs for linguists out there that don't, like you were saying, don't have the word “linguist” in them, not only are not in academia, but also that don't call you a linguist, that they are there. Also, I think that, especially graduating from the University of Washington, which has a really strong computational linguistics program and ties with Microsoft, I kind of had the assumption that because I wasn't part of that track, that I wasn't going to be successful in industry. And like what you were saying about the perception that sociolinguistics is kind of this more squishy science and things like that, thinking corporations are not going to see that as a valuable background, and so just learning how to explain, to present your experience in ways that's valuable for a hiring manager, I think was really important.

Laurel Sutton: It's kind of reframing your skillset and reframing your goals in a way that makes the most sense to industry, which is really different from academia, and also how to frame it differently depending on who you're talking to, right? Because you have the same set of experiences, but you can talk about it in different ways, depending on the type of position that you're applying for. It's still you, but you're presenting a slightly different face to your prospective employer.

Wendy Jacinto: And some of that is becoming familiar with the jargon that they're using, but sometimes it's on a case-by-case basis, looking up words that you don't recognize, [unclear 42:00].

Laurel Sutton: Right. Yeah, exactly. Doing your research.

Wendy Jacinto: Right. Exactly. I mean, Google can be helpful in those, you know, as long as you take it with a grain of salt. But you know, I had never seen the term SaaS, S-A-A-S, before, you know, coming across the Acrolinx application. And rather than ask, “What does this mean?” I could just look it up in Google and see a definition for “software as a service.” And then, “Okay, I have not worked in a company that was defined that way, but now I know what they're talking about when they, you know, use it in a sentence.”

Laurel Sutton: And as we know, if there's one thing that linguists are good at, it's doing research. So…

Wendy Jacinto: Yes, yeah.

Laurel Sutton: Everything you learned in graduate school will absolutely help you figure this stuff out. And then when you go into the interview, you're going to be, you know, the smartest person that they've ever seen.

Wendy Jacinto: Hopefully.

Laurel Sutton: Oh, of course. Of course. I have full confidence in any linguist who's graduating because linguists are special. I feel like we're, you know, sort of the most capable people with language that exists. So I'm very big on people going out there into industry and just doing amazing jobs with whatever they're given.

Wendy Jacinto: Definitely. Yeah. I've already had a few people from the Linguistics Career Launch reach out to me after I've started, since I've started the job to ask about it, and hopefully we’ll be able to kind of pay back the favor and tell them more about my experiences.

Laurel Sutton: Well, I think that's all I wanted to speak with you about, Wendy. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with people. Is it all right if people look you up on LinkedIn and reach out as you were just talking about if they want to do an informational interview or just know more about what you're doing?

Wendy Jacinto: Oh yes. I’d look forward to that.

Laurel Sutton: All right. I will put the link to your LinkedIn profile on the show notes. So again, Wendy, thank you so much for your time.

Wendy Jacinto: Thank you.

Laurel Sutton: Linguistics Career Launch 2021 was a one-month intensive program intended to familiarize linguistics students and faculty with career options beyond academia, in business, tech, government, and nonprofit organizations. Videos of all our recorded sessions are available on our YouTube channel. LCL 2021 was organized by Nancy Frishberg, Alexandra Johnston, Emily Pace, Susan Steele, and Laurel Sutton. You can get in touch at linguisticscareerlaunch@gmail.com.