My name is William \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. When I started the MA program in general linguistics at the CUNY Graduate Center two years ago, my goal was to learn as much as I could about how linguists study language. In the first year, syntax classes sparked my interest in how the mind processes grammar. I then began to research the syntax of Appalachian English with Dr. Christina Tortora. This research led me to see the pivotal role that computational methods play in building parsed corpora and studying the grammars of languages. This encouraged me to take the computational linguistics classes taught by Dr. Kyle Gorman and eventually change from the general linguistics track to computational linguistics. **I am now applying to Stony Brook University’s doctoral program in linguistics to study the syntax of understudied languages and dialects with the methods of corpus analysis and computational linguistics.**

I am currently collaborating with Dr. Tortora on a corpus-based project on Appalachian English. For this project, I track the syntactic variation of covert/overt determiners in this dialect. For example, in the sentence *Doctor came by horseback*, the noun *doctor* has a covert determiner. In contrast, the same noun has the overt determiner *the* in *The doctor came by horseback*. To conduct my investigation, I used the Audio-Aligned and Parsed Corpus of Appalachian English (AAPCAppE), a million-word Penn Treebank corpus, and the software CorpusSearch, a Java program that searches Penn Treebank corpora. My research showed that Appalachian English contains a linguistic phenomenon where speakers drop the determiner, turning overt determiners into covert determiners. Specifically, the results suggested that determiner phrases in subject positions and determiner phrases with temporal nouns particularly favor covert determiners. Moreover, I found that from the 1930s to the 1990s a determiner shift occurred where determiners became increasingly overt. **This research motivates me to continue this line of inquiry to see what other interesting syntactic findings I can discover in nonstandard dialects.**

**My research on determiners in Appalachian English naturally transitions into my future research project on the syntax of Pennsylvania Dutch English. Starting in the late 1600s, German- speaking Anabaptists and Mennonites immigrated to South Central Pennsylvania and formed what is today the Pennsylvania Dutch community. For hundreds of years, they maintained their Germanic language (known as Pennsylvania Dutch) along with a dialect of English called Pennsylvania Dutch English. German influence led to this English dialect having syntactic structures different from those found in Standard American English. Despite its long history in the United States, this dialect is endangered, and only a few people still speak it. As this is an unexplored linguistic space that warrants investigation, I would like to compile a Pennsylvania Dutch English corpus that would then permit me to analyze this dialect’s distinct grammar. My first step to gather the linguistic data for this corpus would be to visit local historical societies and colleges in this region to collect audio samples of this dialect. Then, I would transcribe and parse the linguistic data to make a corpus that I would then publish as an open resource for other researchers interested in Pennsylvania Dutch English.**

My fieldwork for research projects at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have prepared me to conduct data collection for corpus and syntactic research. At Harvard University, where I earned a master’s degree in Language and Literacy, I was on a project investigating the effects of classroom discourse on reading comprehension. My tasks involved data collection and processing to document classroom discussion in Boston middle schools. This study led to a better understanding of how conversations around texts impact students’ abilities to comprehend those texts. My time on this project taught me how to run participants in a group context. I then further developed these skills by running participants in a one-on-one setting as a research assistant for MIT. For this project in the Gabrieli Lab at MIT, I worked on the Audiobook Learning Initiative, a study looking at the effect of audiobooks and language learning technology on fourth graders’ cognitive and language development. I administered assessments to participants before and after an eight-week intervention period that consisted of using an audiobook application for at least an hour a day. These tests measured this intervention’s impact on vocabulary, memory, phonological skills, and literacy. Once published, the study’s findings will shed light on the role audiobooks and technology can play in supporting struggling readers and English language learners.

I believe that SUNY Stony Brook’s focus on syntax **makes it the ideal climate to deepen my linguistic knowledge as well as to continue growing as a researcher.** A major draw for me is the work of Dr. Richard Larson. **Dr. Larson’s theoretical syntactic analyses mirror the type of analyses that I wish to develop and apply to Pennsylvania Dutch English and other understudied languages.** A case in point is his commentary on the DP hypothesis in his article “The DP Hypothesis and (A)Symmetries Between DP and CP.” Additionally, I am interested in the Algonquian Language Revitalization Project. Since I read about the project on Stony Brook’s website, I have become interested in working on this project and studying the syntax of East Coast Native American languages. I would like to work on this project **not only because it parallels work that I plan to conduct on Pennsylvania Dutch English** and other understudied languages but also because I would like to learn more about the Algonquian languages.

In sum, Stony Brook’s PhD program in linguistics would be an excellent place for me to pursue my research interests and a natural choice. The department’s mentorship would help me bring my Pennsylvania Dutch English project to fruition, study the syntax of other understudied languages, and, ultimately, achieve my career goal of becoming a linguistic researcher in academia.