

# International Linguistic Association

## *Monthly Lecture Series*

**John Frederick Bailyn**  
**Stony Brook University**

### **The Politicization of Linguistic Identity: Two post-Cold War case studies**

Cognitive scientists and generative linguists view language as a naturally occurring phenomenon in the minds of speakers (and signers). Each person's idiolect is a unique combination of the input from his/her environment in childhood, superimposed on a blueprint of a linguistic capability that is characteristic of humans and humans alone. Significant overlap among idiolects determines successful linguistic communicability, what we call "a common language". Such a purely bio-linguistic approach to the question of what constitutes a common language often directly contradicts notions of a common language based on national or ethnic identity, reinforced by standardization or other forms of politicization.

In this talk, I present two case studies of the politicization of linguistic identity, one from the former Yugoslavia and one from the former Soviet Union, both large multilingual, multiethnic societies. In one case, ethno-nationalist conflict has involved the stirring of ill-founded fears of linguistic extinction, and linguistic nationalism has caused a naturally-occurring linguistic dialect of great interest to be ignored and vilified. In the other case, the quest for unique linguistic identity based on national identity has so distorted academic discourse surrounding standardization that naturally occurring linguistic forms have been manipulated by decree, and linguistic history partially rewritten, a kind of linguistic violence that is reminiscent of environmental crimes against other sorts of naturally occurring phenomena. Although this linguistic violence has incurred highly detrimental consequences in terms of the loss of larger cultural heritage, a surprising recent movement among academic and cultural elites has begun to partially rectify the situation.

**Saturday, November 4, 2017**  
**11 AM - 12 PM**  
**Borough of Manhattan Community College**  
**Room: N452**  
**199 Chambers Street, New York, NY 10007**

*NOTE: All attendees will be asked to show some form of ID in order to enter the college.*