Two invited lectures by

James McCloskey

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at the University of California, Santa Cruz

Sex and the Irish Language: The Cultural Politics of Language Attrition*

A belief frequently expressed about the Irish language is that ‘there are no words for sex in Irish’. This talk considers the veracity of this strange belief, tries to uncover its origins, and uses that exploration as a probe to better understand the mechanisms of language destruction.

Thursday, April 8, 2010 @ 7:30 PM
 [followed by a reception]

Boston University
KCB (565 Commonwealth Ave.) room 101

Yes, No, and the Construction of Finite Verbs in a VSO Language **

Irish is one of those languages often said to lack words for ‘Yes’ and ‘No’. Where other languages use such words, Irish instead uses so-called ‘responsive forms of the verb’—single word sentences consisting only of an inflected verb. This talk addresses the following two related questions:

(1) How does the grammatical device of the ‘responsive’ relate to the polarity particles (words like ‘Yes’ and ‘No’) found in other languages? Put differently, why is it possible to render with these single word sentences what other languages render by means of words like ‘Yes’ and ‘No’?

(2) How does this effect relate to, and interact with, the single most famous fact about Irish, namely that it is a Verb-Subject-Object language?

Friday, April 9, 2010 @ 3:30 PM

Boston University
KCB (565 Commonwealth Ave.) room 106

Sponsored by:

* The James Geddes, Jr. Lecture Series
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