Language determines our expressive capacities, represents our identities, and connects us with each other across various platforms and cultures. This course introduces classical and contemporary approaches to studying language, focusing on three main areas: 1) language as a system of rules and regulations ("structure"), 2) language as a symbolic mechanism through which individuals and groups mark their presence ("identity") and 3) language as a means of communication ("sign"). In addition to this, the course examines various ways through which language molds our individual selves: from organizing dreams and desires to shaping autobiographies.

Reading/Writing Assignments and Grading:

**Class/Precept Participation 20%**
This is a seminar. Your active participation has a direct and immediate impact on the success and effectiveness of our discussions. Read the assigned texts. Prepare your questions. Look through your classmates’ position papers. Engage with other people’s opinions: argue. comment. elaborate.

**Position Paper(s) 10%**
Throughout the term, you will have to post on BB six short positions papers (no more than 300 words each), in which you perform a close reading of a sentence or a paragraph from an assigned reading.

**Oral Presentation(s) 15%**
Each of you will have 15-20 min to present an analytical interpretation of an individual text in class. Do not summarize the text. Instead, tell us what we need to learn from it; describe how we could use it; show the ways we could connect it with things we already learned and discussed.
Paper In Lieu Of Midterm 25%

*How Not to Talk About Things*. This is a short essay (1500-1800 words), in which you will explore various ways through which language is used to avoid, to obfuscate or even to silence public discussions of a theme (e.g. an event, a person, or an issue) that has a personal or social significance. You could rely on your personal experience but you could also use materials that could be collected during an ethnographic interview. The goal of this assignment is to develop analytical and reflective skills that would allow you to see how language structures our expressive capacities.

Paper in Lieu of Final Exam 30%

*Words as Tools: a Study of Verbal Propaganda*. This project has two parts. For Part One, you will have to create an effective propaganda text (e.g. a leaflet; a poster, a manifesto, a set of slogans, etc). For Part Two, you will have to produce a critical essay (~1300-1500 words) in which you offer a close analytical deconstruction of a propaganda text created by one of your classmates. (I will create a site that will exhibit your propaganda texts accompanied with your analytical essays.)

Please, bring copies of assigned texts to class.

To encourage active exchanges in class, I ask you not to use your laptops and phones; they tend to distract and alienate.

Part 1: THE FUNDAMENTALS

**Week 0: Introduction.**


**Week One: POLITICS**


**Week Two: SELF**


Serguei Oushakine, "We're nostalgic but we're not crazy": Retrofitting the Past in Russia. *The Russian Review* Vol. 66, No. 3 (2007), pp. 451-482.
Optional:

Week Three: STRUCTURE


Optional:

Week Four: MESSAGE


Week Five: METAPHOR

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Chs.1-13 (3-68); 15-18 77-114; 22-23 (147-158); 25 (185-194); 29 (226-228). In George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

PART 2: PEOPLE & WORDS

Week Six: EXPRESSIVITY


Optional:

Week Seven: STYLE


Optional:

Week Eight: DISCOURSE


Optional:

Week Nine: TESTIMONY


Optional:


Week Ten: PROPAGANDA


Optional:

Week Eleven: HATRED

Victor Klemperer, Chapters: 1. LTI (pp. 9-16); 3. Distinguishing Feature: Poverty (pp. 19-24); 5. From the Diary of the First Year (pp. 29-40); 8. Ten Years of Fascism (pp. 51-58); 11. Blurring Boundaries (pp. 69-74); 12. Punctuation (pp. 75-76); 17. ‘System’ and ‘Organization’ (pp. 101-106); 25. The Star (pp. 171-186); 30. The Curse of the Superlative (pp. 221-230); 31. From the Great Movement Forward… (pp. 231-237); An Afterward: “‘Cos of Certain Expressions”’ (pp. 291-283). In Victor Klemperer, The Language of the Third Reich: LTI-Lingua Tertii Imperii. A Philologist’s Book. Trans. Martin Brady. London: Bloomsbury, 2000.


Week Twelve: RESISTANCE


Images: **Maxim Gurbatov.**