

**Boston University**

Two invited lectures by

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## When is Orthography Optimal? \*

Speakers/Writers often complain about the orthography of their language and claim that it is too complicated and does not make any sense (cf. George Bernard Shaw's claim that one could argue for the spelling "ghoti" for the English word 'fish'). But if you were to design an orthography for a language, what would be your main considerations? In the 12th century, an anonymous linguist designed an orthography for Icelandic and wrote a paper about it explaining his decisions using amazingly modern methods. In the middle of the 19th century a group of philologists and historians designed an orthography for Faroese, partly using very different arguments for their decisions. This paper compares these two sets of arguments and discusses what we can learn from them about the nature of orthography in general.

**Friday, April 20, 2012 @ 3PM**

**KCB** (565 Commonwealth Ave) **room 101**

## How do Languages Change? \*\*

Do speakers gradually change their language over the course of their life or do languages mainly change as a result of incomplete acquisition by children? This talk reports on a research project where speakers of Icelandic have been interviewed/tested over a long period of time (some of them were first interviewed over 65 years ago) in order to determine how and to what extent they have changed selected aspects of their language, both phonological and syntactic. The results suggest that there may be structural limits to the ways in which adult speakers change their language and that certain aspects of language may be more susceptible to gradual change in real time than others.

**Monday, April 23, 2012 @ 7:30 PM**

[bula.bu.edu](http://bula.bu.edu)

**SCI** (590 Commonwealth Ave) **room 113**

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\*\* [The BU undergraduate Linguistics Association](#) (partially funded by the undergraduate student fee)