**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

**Code of course: BMA-LOTD-412**

**BMI-LOTD-412E BBN-FIL-312**

**BBN-FIL18-312**

**BMA-FILD-312**

**Title of course: Special Topics in Philosophy of Language: Reflections on Language and Varied Perspectives**

**Lecturer: Zsófia Zvolenszky**

**General aim of the course:**

Through the literary lens of two acclaimed black women’s short stories, we’ll consider how varied perspectives play a role in their story-telling and how the richness of understanding gained through story-telling has eluded traditional approaches in philosophy of language. The authors are the Nigerian-born **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** and the American sci-fi writer **Octavia E. Butler**. The varied perspectives involve shedding light on reality from a radically different angle. That might be the perspective of a Nigerian black woman in the U.S., confronting the heritage of slavery and the ensuing division of blacks and whites in U.S. society, confronting discrimination against African Americans, which remains rampant in so many ways in American society. Or the perspective of a black woman facing discrimination, sexual harassment, objectification at the workplace. Or, through sci-fi work of Butler’s, the perspective of people confronting coexistence with alien species that sheds light on what it would be like for men to give birth (serving as hosts to the alien species), and the light that this sci-fi story, in turn, sheds on things we overlook about the physical burden child-bearing puts on human women. Or how sci-fi work can shed light on societal prejudices, stigmas about diseases; about the role of anger in humans if communication skills were massively impaired. We’ll explore how those varied perspectives of the short stories can (and cannot) be captured with, can be informed by, the tools, observations of recent work in philosophy of language about phenomena like pejorative language, oppression through language, lexical effects.

**Content of the course:**

* ideal and non-ideal communication
* lying and misleading
* generics and defective reasoning,
* slurs and pejorative language
* linguistic oppressing, linguistic silencing
* lexical effects
* the speech act of consent
* each topic discussed will be coupled with a short story by Adichie or Butler

**Grading criteria, specific requirements for the course:**

– 40–60 pages of reading each week

– posting 2 questions/comments at the course discussion forum each week (the 6 best make up 25 % of the final grade), by 4 p.m. on Tuesday

– class participation (worth 20 %)

– writing 3 short (2-3-page-long) response papers during the semester (the best 2 of these go towards 35 % of the final grade)

– once during the semester, giving a presentation (this involves briefly introducing the readings as well as students’ questions and comments, worth 20 %)

**Required readings:**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009, Fourth Estate).

Octavia Butler: *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (1995, 4W8W).

Herman Cappelen and Josh Dever: *Bad Language* (2019 OUP).

**Suggested further reading:**