To: Members of the EAC  
From: The SOAN Department and the Linguistics Program  
Re: New position in Linguistic Anthropology  
Date: April 06, 2012

The Sociology/Anthropology Department and the Linguistics Program are requesting a new tenure track position in linguistic anthropology. As we explain below, this position will have the following result: (1) contribute to the staffing of the new Linguistics Minor at Middlebury; (2) contribute a necessary social and cultural dimension to the existing offerings in language and linguistics at the College; (3) create a “four field” program in Anthropology; (4) further the SOAN department’s contributions to International Studies; (5) provide additional help for advising senior work projects and (6) greatly ease pressure on the SOAN department to staff required courses when one or more anthropologists is on leave.

What is linguistics?  

Linguistics can be broadly described as the study of language as an abstract system. It is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that provides a framework for the understanding of all aspects of language, ranging from the theoretical and structural to the sociological and applied. Linguists employ a wide variety of tools to analyze language at the phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic levels. They also examine language as a universal aspect of human behavior and thinking, the place of language in human life, and the ways in which language functions in society to fulfill the needs of the people who use it. This interdisciplinary field encompasses language in all its different forms and manifestations around the world, spanning geographical, historical, and sociological divides, and providing a link between the humanities, the social sciences, education and the natural sciences. The different disciplines within linguistics-- theoretical linguistics, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, among others-- provide a solid foundation for the study of languages and cultures.

What is linguistic anthropology?  

Linguistic anthropology is different from theoretical or applied linguistics because it examines language in its social context. The field of linguistics is largely concerned with the formal properties and rules of language used by an ideal speaker. Linguistic anthropology focuses on the diversity and complexity of real peoples’ lived reality of moving, dynamic languages. The major research method in linguistic anthropology is to apply anthropological methods to communication, which results in an “ethnography of communication” in its full social and cultural context. Typically, this involves participant observation of language in action, which reveals the nuances and implications of language in specific cultural contexts. From this perspective, language is an ongoing process that people negotiate in many ways, not just a system of phonology, morphology, and syntax. The major topics of interest in linguistic anthropology are how language shapes and contributes to patterns of shared thought and behavior, and how various forms of social inequality and identity are reflected and experienced through language use. Thus, linguistic anthropology focuses on topics such as the relationship of gender roles to language; communication in multi-ethnic societies; how language shapes the differing cultural understandings and categorizations of the world; and the many forms of
cultural discourse ranging from poetics to politics (see examples of linguistic anthropology in the bibliography). Current research agendas in linguistic anthropology examine language socialization, identity construction, language ideologies, and the creation of social space through communication.

**Rationale for this position**

**I. Contribution to the Linguistics Program**

**Ia Academic rationale**

Middlebury is known for its strengths in international studies and languages, and yet curiously, institutionalizing linguistics into the curriculum has been a long difficult process. With the support of the administration and many years of advocacy by faculty and students alike, a minor in Linguistics was instituted in the fall of 2010. Offerings at nearly all of Middlebury’s Schools Abroad and a 4+1 option for further study at the Monterey Institute of International Studies make the Linguistics minor an increasingly attractive option.

The interdisciplinary minor has only two faculty members contractually affiliated with the program: Assistant Professor of Italian Andrei Barashkov (teaching a linguistics course every year), and Professor Aline Germain-Rutherford (teaching one course per year). All other faculty members associated with the minor have responsibilities in their home departments, which makes it difficult to commit to teaching linguistics courses in English on a regular basis.

One of the reasons that it took decades to establish the minor is that linguistics courses at Middlebury are mainly housed in language departments rather than coming from a comparative discipline devoted to the study of all languages and contexts. Anthropology is just such a comparative discipline, and therefore a linguistic anthropologist would help students immersed in many different languages and culture areas to understand the role of language in culture in a comparative way. Linguistic anthropology is particularly well known for drawing global comparative insights from case studies of the languages of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. Furthermore, linguistic anthropology concentrates not only on the formal aspects of language, but on the varying roles of language in society and culture. A linguistic anthropologist will give Middlebury students a well-rounded perspective on language by complementing the College’s existing strengths in the sociolinguistics of major languages. This is important because many language department faculty are not trained in ethnographic research methods, yet many language department students want to do international research on social topics and need methodological guidance.

Student response to the creation of the Linguistics minor in 2010 has been very positive, and the introductory courses LNGT 101 and 102 are always fully enrolled with long wait lists. Many students enrolled in these classes have repeatedly asked for a major in Linguistics. Before the Linguistics Program can even think about a major, the minor needs to be solidified and strengthened. At this point, there are not enough faculty members on campus to satisfy the minor requirements (2 core courses and 3 electives—see below). A new colleague in Linguistic Anthropology would not only add to the curriculum in Linguistics, but would ensure the viability
of the program. A decision to hire a new colleague would reflect Middlebury’s commitment to interdisciplinary innovations and the long-term success of the program.

Ib Programmatic rationale

The Linguistics minor currently requires two introductory classes (LNGT 101 “Introduction to Linguistics,” offered every fall, and LNGT 102 “Introduction to Sociolinguistics,” offered every spring) and three upper-level electives. The program has become quite popular, yet it faces a serious challenge in the near future – a lack of staffing on all levels, as outlined below.

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<th>First Semester:</th>
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<td>Introduction to Linguistics (LNGT 101)</td>
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<th>Second Semester:</th>
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<td>Introduction to Languages in their Socio-cultural Contexts (LNGT 102 or SOAN/LNGT 10X)</td>
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<th>Proposed ideal course of study in the Linguistics minor</th>
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| Three upper-level courses to complete the minor |

**SPRING 2014:** The Linguistics program has no one to teach the core course LNGT 102 “Intro to Sociolinguistics” in the spring semesters of 2014, 2016, 2018, and so forth. Those faculty members affiliated with the Linguistics Program who could teach LNGT 102 have teaching responsibilities in their home departments in those semesters which will prevent them from teaching the intro course. A new colleague in Linguistic Anthropology would ensure the young minor’s future. This new hire would allow the Linguistics Program to alter its LNGT 101 to LNGT 102 introductory sequence to be LNGT 101 to either LNGT 102 or SOAN/LNGT 10X. Because SOAN/LNGT 10X, “Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology,” would be offered every year, it would ensure that students can complete the introductory sequence.

**FALL 2014:** The Linguistics program has to offer at least two elective courses taught in English each semester. In the Linguistics minor, not too many electives can be offered in specific languages because this would exclude students who were not (for example) advanced speakers of German or Chinese. Therefore, the program has to make sure to offer enough electives in English for non-language majors. “Introduction to Modern Logic” (PHIL 180) is a course offered in English almost every semester, but it addresses linguistics as a subtopic rather than the core issue of the course. For the Fall 2014 semester, the program is in desperate need of more upper level classes taught in English. Other than PHIL 180, we currently have one course in development for the fall of 2014: Germain-Rutherford’s proposed Phonetics (LNGT 3XX). It is safe to say that there will be more students than seats in this class, thus forcing students
interested in linguistics to either take courses abroad or abandon their hopes for a minor at Middlebury College.

**Future (AY 2015/16, 2016/17 and so forth):** The Linguistics program already heavily relies on SOAN 359/459 “Language & Power” (taught every other year), yet as outlined above, that is not enough. One additional upper level class taught in English is necessary every other year for a total of one upper level class taught in English every year in order to assure quantity (amount of classes offered) and quality (comprehensive curriculum) in the Linguistics minor.

With the addition of a linguistic anthropologist, the Linguistics minor would not only be kept alive, but would be likely to blossom into a comprehensive and exemplary Linguistics minor ahead of most of our small liberal arts college peers.

**II. Contribution to SOAN Department**

**IIa Academic Rationale**

The Sociology/Anthropology Department is a medium-sized department that brings together two different disciplines in a way that gives Middlebury students maximum choice, breadth, and depth. Presently, the department has five FTEs in anthropology (Closser, Fitzsimmons, Oxfeld, Sheridan, and Stoll).

Anthropology as a discipline contains four foundational subfields. These are sociocultural anthropology, archaeology, physical anthropology and linguistic anthropology. At present, only three of these four subfields are represented in our department. James Fitzsimmons is an archaeologist who also teaches an introductory course in physical anthropology. The other anthropologists, including our medical anthropologist Svea Closser, are sociocultural anthropologists.

In recent years Middlebury students have shown mounting interest in the fourth subfield of anthropology – linguistic anthropology. All of our students are introduced to this subfield in the introductory anthropology course (SOAN 103), and many find this a particularly engaging unit because it allows them to look at their own society from a new perspective. At the moment, Mike Sheridan offers one course on “Language and Power” at the 300/400 levels. He does this to serve our students, but as he would freely admit, he is not trained as a linguistic anthropologist. In addition to the appeal of linguistic anthropology to our own majors, many other students have expressed interest in the study of linguistics. Since 2007, Sheridan has directed senior theses in linguistic anthropology and also supervised an independent scholar in sociolinguistics. This interest is not surprising given the large number of students at the College who study multiple languages. Yet without a linguistic anthropologist, there is no one on campus with the training and expertise to teach courses that focus on comparing the intersections of language, culture and society in non-Western contexts.

Adding a linguistic anthropologist to our department would not only satisfy student demand, but create a four-field anthropology program. Anthropology clearly is a key discipline in our multi-
cultural world yet it has been a relative late-comer to the liberal arts curricula at small liberal arts colleges (it has long been present in larger universities). When it first appeared in small colleges it was usually confined to sociocultural anthropology. However, the four fields of the discipline are required if our students are to understand the ways that language, culture, society and human evolution interact and thus shape our lives. Adding a linguistic anthropologist to our department would strengthen the anthropology side of the major and contribute as well to the study of language at the College more broadly. Indeed, considering Middlebury’s fame in the study of language, the addition of a specialist in linguistic anthropology is long overdue and will be welcomed from many quarters.

IIb Programmatic Rationale

As you may be aware, we require all SOAN majors to complete a senior project as part of the requirements for the major. Most of us also advise additional senior projects because of our affiliations with other programs/majors on campus. SOAN faculty actively participate in International Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Teacher Education, Environmental Studies, and Religion. We do this even though we have approximately 90 majors (single, joint, and double) each year. This number does not include IS students affiliated with the department (23 in 2010-11), many of whom complete senior work within SOAN.

Owing to our commitments to other majors (as well as SOAN) we teach courses such as:

- SOAN 211 for our joint majors with Environmental Studies;
- SOAN 252 for our joint majors with Psychology;
- SOAN 191 for our joint majors with for WAGS;
- SOAN 215 for our students earning Teacher Education certificates;
- SOAN 387 and SOAN 467 for our pre-med students;
- SOAN 326, SOAN 327, SOAN 332 and SOAN 335 for IS-Latin America, IS-Africa and IS-East Asia majors who do their disciplinary specializations with us.

In addition, we presently require all our majors to take both the introductory course in sociology (SOAN 105) and the introductory course in sociocultural anthropology (SOAN 103). The introductory courses in archaeology (SOAN 107) and physical anthropology (SOAN 159), while not required, are always oversubscribed.

When the SOAN department and the Linguistics faculty met in February 2012 to discuss this joint proposal, we envisioned the following scenario for the teaching responsibilities of a new colleague in Linguistic Anthropology:

1) SOAN/LNGT 10X, “Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology” every year. This would function as one option for the required introductory sequence for the minor.
2) SOAN/LNGT 3XX, an upper-level course to fulfill the same programmatic needs as Sheridan’s SOAN 359, “Language and Power”. This could be annual or on a two year rotation with another SOAN 300 level class.
3) An area course in an area not currently offered by the department every year
4) Leave-replacement teaching for departmental colleagues on sabbatical; either our introductory sociocultural anthropology course (SOAN 103) or qualitative research methods (SOAN 302). One of these will be necessary three out of five years.
5) Other courses to be decided in consultation with both SOAN and LNGT, and all linguistic anthropology courses would be cross-listed.

As described in section 1b above, we would adjust the requirements of the Linguistics minor to require students to take either LNGT 102 (“Introduction to Sociolinguistics”) or SOAN/LNGT 10X (“Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology”) as their second introductory course for the minor after LNGT 101. The new linguistic anthropologist would be contractually obligated to teach the introductory course and at least one upper-level linguistic course per year.

This teaching schedule will bring much-needed flexibility to both the SOAN Department and the Linguistics program. In addition to adding valuable expertise to upper-level linguistics courses, the new anthropologist’s 100-level teaching every year would free up other Linguistics faculty to develop upper-level courses in their subfields of linguistics – electives that the program so desperately needs. These offerings would ensure students’ ability to complete the minor at Middlebury. Within the SOAN Department, the new hire would strengthen the department because it would allow the development of our archaeology curriculum. James Fitzsimmons has functioned as a leave replacement to teach SOAN 103 (the introductory anthropology course) when either David Stoll or Ellen Oxfeld is on leave. With the new colleague teaching SOAN 103 as a leave replacement, Fitzsimmons could develop a course on archaeological method and theory (topics which are sufficiently different from those in sociocultural anthropology that they are not covered in the department’s theory and methods courses).

The new linguistic anthropologist would also cover a geographic and cultural area not represented by Middlebury’s current anthropology and linguistics faculty. This means that we would seek to hire someone with expertise in areas other than East Asia, Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Islamic South Asia. The new linguistic anthropologist’s area studies course is therefore likely to contribute to International Studies.

**Draft of Advertisement**

MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE, MIDDLEBURY, VT 05753. The Sociology-Anthropology Department invites applications for a tenure track position in linguistic anthropology beginning in the Fall of 2013. The successful candidate must be able to offer introductory and upper-level courses in linguistic anthropology, contribute courses to the Linguistics program, and teach courses in anthropological methods and introductory sociocultural anthropology. Geographic area is open, but preference will be given to those that complement existing areas within the department. Appointment will be at the Assistant Professor level. Applicants must show evidence of teaching excellence and have an active research agenda. Middlebury College uses Interfolio to collect all faculty job applications electronically. Email and paper applications will not be accepted. Through Interfolio, submit a letter of application addressed to Search
Committee SOAN/LNGT, curriculum vitae, graduate transcript, and three current letters of recommendation, at least two of which must speak to teaching ability/promise. More information at http://www.interfolio.com/apply/3067. Middlebury College is an equal opportunity employer, committed to hiring a diverse faculty to complement the increasing diversity of the student body.

Some Examples of Linguistic Anthropology

Linguistic Anthropology, 2e. Alessandro Duranti (Cambridge 2009).
Listen to the Heron’s Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India. Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold (University of California Press 1994)
Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation During Perestroika. Nancy Ries (Cornell 1997).
Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms. Shirley Heath (Cambridge 1983).