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Svenja Völkel (Mainz)

The linguistic encoding of personhood and social structure in Tongan

The aim of this presentation is to show how the interdisciplinary field of 'anthropological linguistics/ linguistic anthropology' contributes to a deeper understanding of language, its embeddedness in the cultural context and its cultural meaning. Kinship terminologies and honorifics, for instance, are linguistic forms of person encoding, indexing cultural concepts of social relationships, as the example of Tongan demonstrates.

Tonga is a Polynesian island state in the Pacific. As characteristic for Polynesian societies, it is a highly stratified chiefly society in which nobody is of equal rank and status. On the societal level, there are basically three levels of rank, namely kingly, chiefly, and common rank, which is ascribed by birth. On the extended family level, people have higher or lower status, depending on the kinship relation. The father's sister, for instance, is extremely high in status, while the mother's brother is extremely low in status.

Linguistically, Tongan is an Austronesian language of the Polynesian subfamily. Its kinship terminology can be classified as bifurcate merging Hawaiian type and the honorifics consisting of lexical registers as referent type. Combining anthropological and linguistic research, however, it becomes apparent that the terminological classification of relatives expresses social status and that the respectful registers do not only honour people of higher societal rank but are a kind of verbal taboo.

Altogether, a person's embeddedness in this complex social network is expressed in multiple ways, including linguistic and non-linguistic means of expression such as sitting order, clothing, and gift exchange processes. It underlies daily behaviour and becomes particularly apparent at special occasions.

Svenja Völkel ist seit 2006 wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin am Institut für Sprachtypologie der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz und sie war zwischen 2004 und 2010 Lehrbeauftragte und Mitglied des Forschungsprojekts "Person, space and memory in the contemporary Pacific" am Institut für Ethnologie der Ruprecht Karls-Universität Heidelberg. 2007 promovierte sie mit einer interdisziplinären Arbeit. Ihre Forschungsinteressen liegen im Bereich anthropologische Linguistik, Sprachtypologie, kognitive Linguistik/Anthropologie und Sprachkontakt mit einem regionalen Fokus auf Ozeanien. Unter anderen ist sie Autorin der Monographie *Social structure, space and possession in Tongan culture and language* (John Benjamins, 2010), Co-Autorin des Buchs *Introducing linguistic research* (Cambridge University Press, in press) und Mitherausgeberin der Buchreihe *Anthropological Linguistics* (Mouton de Gruyter).

Institutskolloquium Sommersemester 2021 (Leitung: Nico Nassenstein)

Wann? Dienstag, 18. Mai 2021, 18:00–19:15 Uhr

Wo? Konferenzschaltung via Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4362747051?pwd=ZW85YmFKUjQ1aHZFeFIWVjF0bVdnZz09>

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