

TONGAN SPEECH LEVELS: PRACTICE AND TALK ABOUT PRACTICE IN THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL HIERARCHY

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

The purpose of this paper is to consider the relation between Tongan conceptualisations of speech levels and Tongan use of speech levels. I will argue that while both are concerned with distinctions among speech levels, these two cultural constructions of social hierarchy differ in important and interesting ways. This paper should be considered a preliminary introduction to the topic, with additional and more detailed analysis to follow in later writing.

While it has been written about Tongans that they use different terms to refer to the same actions of Commoners, Nobles and the King, in practice words for both kingly and noble actions are extended to other high status social categories. But it is primarily noble terms that are widely used. They play an important role in respectful public speech in general, and in performed verbal art in particular. Thus while statements about these three separate vocabularies suggest they are analogously distinct from one another, the kingly and noble terms are very different from one another in patterns of use, and play rather different roles in the Tongan cultural construction of social hierarchy. Moreover, discussion of Tongan speech levels (and of speech levels in other societies) usually suggests that they can be understood without reference to other sources of variation in language use, so that they are kept separate conceptually from other kinds of analysis of language use by Tongan and non-Tongan analysts alike. But it is clear that in Tonga the tradition of performed verbal art is in practice very much intertwined with the use of Tongan speech levels.

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By speech levels, I refer to the aforementioned three-way distinction among vocabulary items used to and about Commoners, Nobles and the King. These have been presented in very similar formats, partially reproduced in Table 1, in columned word lists in Gifford (1929), Shumway (1971) and *Ko e Kalama 'i he Lea Faka-Tonga* (n.d.) that show the parallel equivalents of commoner, noble and kingly terms, and in the case of Gifford and Shumway, their English equivalents. What I am calling speech levels here have also been referred to as respect or honorific forms of language use. I choose the phrase 'speech levels' to convey their very paralleled and hierarchical conceptualisation, analogous to Javanese speech levels (e.g. Errington 1985), even though Tongan levels are characterised primarily in lexical terms, without the phonological and morphosyntactic dimensions of complexity readily recognised in the description of Javanese speech levels.

TABLE 1: EXAMPLES FROM PUBLISHED TONGAN SPEECH LEVEL WORD LISTS

1a: From E.W. Gifford (1929) *Tongan society*: Rank and Language

1. MUOMUA (LEADING CHIEFS)	2. LOTOLOTO (MIDDLE CHIEFS)	3. KAKAI (PEOPLE)	ENGLISH
fakamomoko	fakamomofi	fakamafana	To warm one's self
fakamonuka	polai	tafai	To lance (cut)
feitaumafa	halofia	fiekai	Hungry
fekita	uma	uma	To kiss
hala	pekia	mate	Dead
hoihoifua	katakata	kata	To laugh
hoko	vala	fatei	Skirt-like garment (sarong)
houhau	tupotamaki	ita	Angry

1b: From E. Shumway (1971) *Intensive course in Tongan*: Respect Terminology for Nobility and Royalty

English	Kakai	Hou'eiki	Tu'i
angry	'ita	tuputāmaki	houhau
bathe	kaukau	tākele	fakamālū
cemetery	fa'itoka	mala'e	mo'unga
children	fānau	fānau	fale'alo
clothes	kofu	kofu	fakama'u
come	ha'u	me'a	hā'ele
converse	fetalanoa'aki	feme'a'aki	fefolofolai
desire	loto	loto	finangalo
die	mate	pekia	hala
eat	kai	'ilo	taumafa

Table continued on next page

1c: From *Ko e Kalama: Vocabulary for the Three Classes of People in the Tongan Society, Commoners, Nobles and the Royalty*

COMMONERS (Kakai)	NOBLES (Hou'eiki)	KING (Tu'i)
manako	manako	mokoi
fata	vaka	kauala
navu	pepena	palai
mohevale	misi	lika
ngangau	mamafa	ngalulu
mate-'i-tahi	mole-'i-tahi	takavaha
fulufulu	halakava	hoha'a
hinehina	hinā	sialea

Tongan speech levels are recognised by Tongans and Western European linguists alike (e.g. Milner 1961; Blixen 1966) to be similar to and related to Samoan respect vocabulary distinctions between commoner and chief, and partially also between *tulafale* (talking chiefs) and highest chiefs (Duranti 1987). They are also recognised in the linguistic literature (Tregear 1895; Milner 1961) to be instances of a phenomenon widespread in Austronesian languages of the linguistic marking of relative status of speakers or relative importance of speech and speaking context, although the linguistic realisations of such distinctions and their local cultural conceptualisations vary greatly (see, for example, Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1986) and there has been considerable disagreement about how such distinctions are historically related.

Silverstein (1979, 1981) has used the term 'metapragmatics' to refer to the analysis provided by speakers of a language of the ways in which their language is used. He argues that speakers are able to identify certain aspects of language structure and associate them with functionally differentiated patterns of use more readily than others. In other words, some aspects of language form are more salient and subject to metapragmatic analysis than others. This point can be seen as commentary on and qualification of Boas's (1911) view that language is generally less subject to "secondary rationalizations" than other forms of culture, and hence a purer and better source of data for establishing prehistoric relations among social groups. More particularly Silverstein suggests that segmentable phenomena such as lexical items and isolatable morphemes are more accessible to speakers than non-segmentable phenomena in language such as phonetic or phonological variation and syntax.

Shibamoto (1987) has addressed this same issue in her analysis of Japanese concepts of the ways in which men's and women's language use differs in relation to behaviour. Segmentable elements, such as the greater use of the σ - prefix on nouns by females and gender-differentiated use of pronouns and sentence-final particles are salient in Japanese gender metapragmatics. In contrast, non-segmentable syntactic variation in word order, while documented by Shibamoto in analysis of naturally occurring speech, is not part of Japanese gender ideology. Shibamoto has also been able to show that those aspects of linguistic behaviour do not vary across contexts in the same ways, by comparing conversational data with the Japanese equivalent to television soap operas. Soap operas are recognised to exaggerate or intensify feminine and masculine characteristics of speech in everyday life. Shibamoto found that the features of speech that were part of Japanese metapragmatics of gender differences in language use were in fact exaggerated in the television programs compared to conversational data. But those aspects of linguistic behaviour which she found to behaviourally

correlate with gender that were not part of this gender ideology were no different on television than in conversation.

Analogously, Errington (1985) has argued that the segmentable aspects of speech level usage most elaborated in Javanese metapragmatics, namely the usages of second person pronouns, are undergoing change over time in a different way than those non-segmentable aspects of speech level usage that are less salient to speakers and less elaborated metapragmatically.

I use these studies here first to make the point that Tongan metapragmatic analysis of speech levels is consistent with Silverstein's suggestion that local metapragmatics are more likely to focus on segmentable phenomena, in that characterisation of speech levels is overwhelmingly in terms of analogous lexical items, rather than syntactic or phonological phenomena. And like Shibamoto and Errington, I wish to distinguish between theories of use and use or practice itself. However, unlike them, I will stress that there is also theory *in* use, but of a different nature or order than theories *of* use.

But there is an additional concern to be addressed here initially in this metapragmatic turn of analysis, and that is that it raises the possibility of a distinction between local members' metapragmatic analysis and the analysis of the linguist. In the three sources on Tongan speech levels that I have cited so far (Gifford, Shumway and *Ko e Kalama*; cf. Table 1), which I view as examples of metapragmatic analyses, the basic tripartite distinctions among levels are basically the same, although variation among them will be considered later. This is particularly true of the two more recent and currently-in-use presentations of Shumway and *Ko e Kalama*, which use the English words Commoner, Noble and King as the social identities with which each parallel lexical list is associated. Here it appears that Tongans and Western scholars of their language embrace essentially the same view of these speech levels.

How does such agreement come about? It is not the purpose of this paper to dwell on this issue, nor am I in a position to trace the development of such agreement. But I believe that for Tonga, and I suspect that for other parts of the world, local interpretations of local cultures are often quite directly taken up by Western European scholars and presented as their own, without any distinction being made between the two, or 'voices' being carefully sorted out. Certainly much of Gifford's analysis of kinship organisation, and that of more recent scholars, sounds very much like the kinds of things Tongans say today about the mother's side and the father's side. And Marcus's (1980) explanation of the new commoner ways of achieving status arising alongside of and in some ways partially replacing traditional avenues to status is also commonly spoken of in Tonga today. It can be argued, of course, and many contemporary anthropologists do so argue, that contemporary local cultural analyses are the result of a dialectic over time between coloniser and colonised. Thus one might envision Gifford's informants having given him a certain account, which he then modified, with that account then influencing later accounts up to the present. Here I simply want to suggest more Tongan agency in the creation of these accounts, both in the past and in the present, than is typically recognised. Today *Ko e Kalama* is the text book used by Tongan high school students for instruction in the proper use of Tongan speech levels, use which they are examined on in the government-mandated exams taken by Tongan high school students that then determine whether they will have access to particular kinds of government jobs, which are in turn the main source of cash income in this tiny non-industrialised nation. *Ko e Kalama* and its use, then, are government-supported representations of Tongan speech levels, and most of the Tongans with whom I discussed speech levels referred to this high school training as a foundational source of their knowledge of such terminology.

2. TONGAN TALK ABOUT PRACTICE

In Tonga today, and in the literature on Tonga, metapragmatic discussions of language use focus on hierarchical aspects of Tongan society. In a general way, the linguistic expression of social hierarchy is conceptualised in terms of the use of a variety of verbal strategies for raising others and lowering oneself. For me such strategies are epitomised in what in Western terms is the host-guest relationship, but here it may also be appropriate to think in terms of an insider-outsider relationship. Insiders to social units of varying sizes and natures, but often most publically and visibly the village, relate as hosts to outsider guests, raising their guests and lowering themselves.

Analytically, in Tongan talk about talk, there are at least two manifestations of hierarchically organised language use, in each of which lexical characterisations figure prominently. First, Tongans distinguish between words to and about Commoners, Nobles and the King, to be elaborated further on. Churchward (1953) elaborates on the three-way distinction by positing five levels: 'vulgar', 'everyday', 'polite', 'honorific' and 'regal'. More recently, Taliai (1989) has described Tongan speech levels in a four-way system, distinguishing among *lea 'oe tu'i* 'language of the king', *lea 'oe hou'eiki* 'language of the chiefs', *lea 'a e tu'a* 'language of the commoners', and *lea 'oe tatau* 'language of the equal'. In this framework, many of the *tu'a* words would be characterised as vulgar in Churchward's terms, while *tatau* words are those associated with Commoners, who are referred to as *kakai* 'people' in Tongan in other analyses (cf. Table 1), rather than as *tu'a*. *Tu'a* actually comes closer to English 'commoner' in that it refers to untitled persons and definitely carries the implication of lesser status than chiefs, and this is probably the reason it is not usually used. It should also be noted that both Collocott (1925) and Blixen (1966) have a predominantly dualistic conceptualisation of Tongan speech levels, possibly influenced by the predominantly dualistic conceptualisation of the Samoans with regard to their respect vocabulary.

These interpretations suggest some variability and instability in the way speech levels are conceptualised. In my experience it is common for Tongans to distinguish between everyday and polite usage, and to identify particular words as impolite or vulgar. But the three-way differentiation I discuss here is still by far the more common and salient way of identifying status-differentiated speech levels.

The second major distinction relevant to the cultural construction of social hierarchy in Tongan talk about language use is that between everyday language use and what English speakers refer to as 'public speech', or the speech associated with what is rightly called the Tongan literary tradition, epitomised in the works of *punake*, composers of poetry and song-dances that entail the combined or separate abilities of lyricist, composer and choreographer (Shumway 1977; Kaepler 1976), and also in the talk of *matāpule*, the titled talking chiefs of Tonga. This literary and rhetorical tradition would in contemporary sociolinguistic terms be considered speech that is performed (Bauman 1975). It is verbal art, subject to audience evaluation and appreciation, the greatest gift of host to guest. People are moved by its beauty, and held spellbound by its wit, intellect, and resourceful display of knowledge of Tongan myth and history.

Like the first metapragmatic distinction of speech levels made by Tongans, this special way of using language is also characterised in terms of kinds of words: beautiful words and metaphorical words. But unlike the speech level distinctions which associate the use of words primarily with particular role relationships, there is much more here. Public performed speech is to a great extent associated with particular genres of speech, most pervasively with speeches and songs for a wide range of occasions, but also with old and new elaborately composed, practiced and performed group

song-dances for special celebrations such as the King's birthday, the opening of a new church, or a visit from an Apostle of the Church of Latter Day Saints, particularly the *ma'ulu'ulu* and the *lakalaka*. The speeches and debates of *matāpule* in formal kava circles on such occasions as funerals, weddings, and the investitures of Nobles are other important examples of genre-specific uses of rhetorical Tongan. In the Methodist denominations the literary language is also important in sermons, prayers and hymns. While the particular content and structure of these genres is specific not only to the events in which they take place, but also to the particular social groups and individuals involved, certain stylistic conventions are associated with this tradition: beautiful words, old words, rare words, metaphorical language use, proverbs, and more generally allusiveness and indirectness. In all of this, natural imagery figures prominently. Trees, rocks, and flowers index and stand for important mythical and historical events, social groups and individuals, and stories about them and relationships among them.

Traditionally the use of such language was associated with the chiefly classes. Queen Sālote is regarded as one of Tonga's greatest poets, and her songs are still sung and recorded, performed and heard on the radio. But today there are also commoners famous for their rhetorical skills. Not everyone understands all of what is said in literary language, and its instantiations are by their very nature subject to multiple interpretations, some more authoritative than others. Today then, as in earlier times, the ability to be eloquent, inspiring and entertaining in performance, and to interpret the performances of others is highly valued and conveys status upon the skilled. To perform for people honours them, and at the same time conveys honour upon the performer. In all of this, rhetorical Tongan is associated with social hierarchy, as are the speech level distinctions.

But it is Tongan speech levels that are most simply, sharply and clearly analysed by both Tongans and Western students of Tongan language and culture. I have already noted that these speech levels are conceptualised in terms of analogous words used to and about Commoners, Nobles and the King. Thus people will say that when using Tongan words for 'go', *'alu* is used to and about Commoners, *me'a* is used to and about Nobles, and *hā'e/e* is used to and about the King. Or that for 'come' *ha'u* is used for Commoners, *me'a* for Nobles and *hā'e/e* for the King. Several points can be made about such distinctions. First, the examples people offer to illustrate speech levels are consistently tripartite. They come in threes. Examples for which the words are the same for Commoners and Nobles, but different for the King, or the same for Nobles and the King, but different for Commoners, tend not to be given.

Second, such examples tend to background semantic relationships across these tripartite examples. For example, as is partially reflected in my two instances above, the relatively semantically unspecified commoner noun *me'a* 'thing', is used as a verb in referring to a variety of noble actions, including 'come', 'go', 'know' (*me'a'i*), 'read' (*me'atohi*), 'run', 'see', 'sit' and 'speak'. But because the tripartite word lists and examples never indicate when a noble or kingly word is also a Tongan commoner word with a different meaning when used as a commoner word (rather than, say, a word borrowed from Samoan), such relationships are obscured to the outsider.

Third, these normative statements are most definitely from the point of view of the Commoner. Secondary statements, that is, those made after such initial statements, or when people are asked for more information, add that people of the same status level will use commoner terms with one another, and that the Nobles and the Royal Family use commoner words when speaking to those below them.

With regard to the lists that have been published and partially presented in Table 1, it should also be noted that each list is presented as finite, rather than open-ended, while there is in fact great

variation from list to list, and many terms identified in the Churchward dictionary (1959) as honorific or regal, or by Tongan consultants working with transcriptions of naturally occurring speech, are not included. Nor can one know from such lists that there is in fact considerable variation from speaker to speaker of the Tongan language in words that they know, use, and identify in texts as noble and kingly.

Most importantly, however, for what follows, it must be pointed out that the lists presented in Table 1 iconically convey that each level is quite distinct and separate, and analogously so. In other words, the noble level is as distinct from the commoner level as the kingly level is from the noble level.

The salient role relationships associated with the tripartite conceptualisation have changed over time, and are not unambiguous today. Thus Gifford's (1929) three categories are *muomua* 'leading chiefs', *lotoloto* 'middle chiefs' and *kakai* 'people'. Shumway (1971) titles his discussion of speech levels 'Respect Terminology for Nobility and Royalty', but then uses the Tongan terms *tu'i*, *hou'eiki* and *kakai*, which he does not gloss, but which are glossed in *Ko e Kalama* (n.d.) as 'king', 'nobles' and 'commoners'.

In everyday usage *kakai* means 'people'. *Hou'eiki* means 'chiefs'. It can also be used to refer to the present-day Nobles, but another term often used is the word borrowed from English, *nōpele*. *Tu'i* means 'king, queen or sovereign', but is used as a descriptor with other role titles to convey highest office for both traditional and modern positions, including the Tu'i Tonga. Thus common usage gives us English glosses of people, chiefs, and sovereign, while the *Ko e kalama* glosses give us the British social order hierarchy terms of Commoners, Nobles and King. There is, then, an inherent ambiguity in the relationship between the Tongan terms and their English glosses in *Ko e kalama*, a deliberate ambiguity, I think, made sense of by contemporary Tongan government-promulgated views of the relationship between Tonga as a modern nation state and the pre-nation state social order.

The present-day account given to me of the use of speech levels in pre-western contact times is that the terms associated today with the King were then used exclusively to and for the Tu'i Tonga, while the terms associated today with the Nobles were used in talking to or about chiefs. The Tu'i Tonga at the height of the Tu'i Tonga Empire in the twelfth century was regarded as embodying both sacred and secular power. Over time, as his secular power was delegated or relegated to first the Tu'i Ha'atakalaua and later to the Tu'i Kanokupolu chiefly lines, the position and the person of the Tu'i Tonga were conceptualised increasingly as of a sacred nature.

By the early 1800s the Tu'i Tonga line had considerably weakened in influence. Tāufa'āhau, who later became the first King of Tonga, Tāufa'āhau Tupou I, is credited with having unified the country through conquest and with the support of missionary influence on the British, taking the title of Tu'i Kanokupolu in the process. During the period from the 1850s to the 1870s the traditional Tongan social order was transformed into that of a nation-state, in this case a hereditary monarchy with all the symbolic and politico-legal trappings of Western European nations, particularly Great Britain, including a Constitution, and a Legislative Assembly with members from Commoner and Noble classes. This is a process well documented by Lātūkefu (1974, 1975). The Tongan Constitution of 1875, then, makes a critical legal distinction between the King, Nobles and Commoners, with regard to both rights to representation and rights to land.

At the time these events were taking place, Lātūkefu makes it clear that the Tongans aimed to establish a form of government that would be familiar to the British and other Europeans so that they

would be legitimised in British eyes and in this way stave off colonisation. They also aimed to establish a form of government that could be seen as a continuation of the pre-national Tongan social order. And they were encouraged in all of this by the Methodist missionaries upon whom Tāufa'āhau relied. Tāufa'āhau himself, as both Tu'i Kanokupolu and first King, embodied this link between the old order and the new order. And his descendents and inheritors to the throne reinforced this link by marrying spouses from the other two titled lines of the Tu'i Tonga and the Tu'i Ha'atakalaua.

I have been told that there is evidence from the analysis of written documents that in the early phases of the monarchy, which clearly was defined as a secular form of authority, and did not embody the sacred associations with the Tu'i Tonga, the terms which had been reserved for reference and address to the Tu'i Tonga were not applied to the new King. Only over time have those terms been increasingly applied to him, raising the possibility that over time the kingship has gradually taken on the aura of both sacred and secular power.

The situation regarding the transition from 'chiefly' (*hou'eiki*) to noble legitimised authority is more complex. Although Lātūkefu (1975) notes that from among the various highly prestigious chiefly lines, it was only those men who were of high status *and* had large followings who were made Nobles by the King, there are stories in Tonga today that give accounts of why certain very high and powerful chiefs of that time who should have been made Nobles were not. These same titled persons also still figure as prominently as the Nobles in some traditional activities where rank is salient.

This brief and oversimplified account of the transition to national polity helps explain the ambiguous pairing of Tongan and English words for speech levels particularly evident in *Ko e Kalama*. It should be apparent that the present tripartite analysis of speech is itself an iconic representation of the present-day political order of Tonga as a nation, yet at the same time it links this present-day political order to the past political order, giving it double legitimacy to both the outside world and the people of Tonga as they learn this representation in school.

This account will also help explain the pattern of actual usage of Tongan speech levels to which we now turn.

3. PRACTICE

In actual practice, the use of words identifiable and identified by Tongans as *kakai*, *hou'eiki* and *tu'i* in transcripts of Tongan discourse suggests a far less clear-cut and more complex Tongan social construction of social hierarchy within Tonga than the metapragmatic analysis embodied in the word lists.

First, and most importantly, noble and kingly terms are not just used to and about Nobles and the King.

'Kingly' terms are regularly extended in reference and address to God and Jesus, particularly in the three oldest and most traditional Methodist denominations of the Free Wesleyan Church, the Free Church of Tonga, and the Church of Tonga, but not in the more recently introduced churches such as the Church of the Latter Day Saints. Examples (1) and (2) illustrate the canonical usages of kingly speech level terms in reference to the sovereign of Tonga, and are taken from the December 1984 twentieth anniversary publication of the national newspaper, *Ko e Kalonikali Tonga* (The Tongan Chronicle).

- (1) *Ko hono ua, ko e hala 'a Kuini Sālote 'i Tisema 16 i hono ta'u 65.*
The second was the **death** of Queen Sālote on 16 December in her 65th year.
- (2) *Pea na'e folofola 'a e Tama Tu'i 'o pehē: "Ko e Hala ki he Tu'umalie ko e ngaue malohi".*
And the King **pointed out**, 'Hard work is the best way to riches'.

Examples (3) and (4), taken from a prayer in a Free Wesleyan Church service recorded in May 1985, illustrate the extension of kingly words to God.

- (3) *'Oku mau teiapa'a 'i ho takafalu 'i ho ao mā'oni'oni ho'o 'afio 'i he pongipongi ko eni.*
We are huddling behind you (at your **back**) in your holy **presence** your **majesty** this morning.
- (4) *'Ei tokoni mai 'a e 'afio na, talia e lotu 'oku mau fai 'ia Sīsū Kalaisi ko ho 'alo homau Fakamo'ui.*
Oh (yes) help us **Lord**, receive our prayers in Jesus Christ your **son** our Saviour.

In this way the pre-contact associations of these words with the sacredness of the Tu'i Tonga and the present-day authority of the King have been transferred to the Christian God. While the initial characterisation of use of these words by Tongans is always associated with the secular hierarchy, these religious usages are often mentioned second when people are asked about other uses of the speech levels. There is, however, occasional reticence about mentioning such uses, and the non-use of such extensions by some religious denominations is deliberate. Churchward's (1959) dictionary identifications of meanings always keep regal usages separate from religious usages, that is, words are never identified as entailing both, even the word for God and King, *'afio*. Clearly there is ambivalence about the appropriateness of merging of secular and sacred authority semantically through such usage. That it exists and that it is widespread is, however, undeniable. At the same time, there are certain terms that are never used for both sovereign and deity, if only by virtue of logic and discourse constraints, but perhaps for other reasons for well. For example, in the same prayer cited above, the noble word for death, *pekia*, and not the kingly word *hala* used for Queen Sālote was used to refer to the death of Jesus, and there would be no other religious deaths at the top of the sacred hierarchy to refer to. There are no other major and regular extensions of kingly words that I know of outside the Royal Family.

The use of 'noble' terms is considerably more complex. Examples (5) and (6) illustrate canonical uses of noble words to refer to a noble. Example (5) is taken from the same prayer as above.

- (5) *Pea kei laumālie ai 'a Tu'ivakanō...*
And Tu'ivakanō is still in **good health**...

Example (6) is from a *fono* (village meeting) recorded in February 1988 where a Town Officer is referring to the fact that the local Noble is leaving to go overseas to school. This example also illustrates the range of meanings of *me'a*, the commonness of its use, and the impossibility of retrieving its meanings without recourse to previous discourse context and/or shared knowledge between speaker and addressee.

- (6) *Ko e me'a 'a e 'Eiki 'o hangē ko e me'a 'a K. 'E me'a ia he ta'u e fā.*
The **leaving** of our Noble mentioned by K. He **will be overseas** for four years.

Noble words are also used for non-noble chiefs. They are also extended to positions of authority in European-derived institutional complexes in Tonga. Example (7) is taken from a Magistrate's Court proceeding recorded in October 1987. The Police Prosecutor is addressing the Magistrate.

- (7) *Ko e hā ha me'a ma'olunga 'a e feitu'una 'e 'aonga ki he faka'iloa 'e fiemālie ki ai e talatalaaki.*

Any high **advice** of **yours** will be useful to the defendant and the prosecutor will be comfortable with it.

Noble words are also extended to persons in positions of authority or high status outside Tonga. Example (8) is from the same issue of *Ko e Kalonikali* as the first two examples, underscoring the way in which the Tongan sovereign has higher status than any outside authority, no matter how grand.

- (8) *Ko e 'uluaki ko e pekia 'a e taki fuoloa 'o Pilitania ko Sir Winston Churchill 'i Sānuāli 24.*
The first was the **death** on 24 January of statesman-historian Sir Winston Churchill.

Just to make matters more confusing, noble words are also used to raise the level of formality and politeness in public discourse generally. Example (9) is taken from the same Free Wesleyan church service as the examples from the prayer, but here the genre is 'announcements', for which the Tongan word *tu'utu'uni* 'instructions' is used, being spoken by the *sētuata* 'steward', rather than the preacher.

- (9) *...pea kou kole atu ko kimoutolu 'oku fai'aho mo kimoutolu 'oku me'a mai ki mu'a, 'osi mahino ia.*

...and I ask you who have birthdays and who have reasons to **come** forward, as you already know.

Here, although the noble word for 'come' is used, the noble word for 'know', which is also *me'a* is not; instead the commoner word *mahino* is used, even though this speaker uses *me'a* for 'know' in other utterances in this text. This thins out the frequency of noble words compared with the example of references to the Noble and K, his representative in example (6) from a *fono*, and suggests the way in which subtle distinctions in level of speech may be made by varying the frequency of noble words.

In example (7) I showed how a Prosecutor addressed a Magistrate. Examples (10) and (11) from the same proceeding show how the Magistrate reciprocates noble terminology to the prosecutor in (10), but does not use it to the young missionary witnesses in (11).

- (10) *'Ai mai ha'o me'a ki he hia lolotonga.*

Just **speak** (literally 'your/singular-any word') to the present crime.

- (11) *Faifekau, 'oku 'i ai ha'amo lau ki he faka'iloa?*

Missionaries, do you have something to **say** (literally 'your/dual-any word') about the defendant?

This of course shows more respect to the Prosecutor than to the witnesses.

When I asked Tongans why noble terms might be used in some of these examples, I was told it was because "a Noble might be present". This is a conventionalised response, analogous to the Magistrates' scolding of criminal defendants for the crime of using bad words (*lea kovi*) because sisters and brothers, who must not use or hear such words when co-present, might be present.

Thus, just as the levels themselves have been reanalysed and renamed in English in metapragmatic analysis to represent the highest level political order, their *use* also indicates a reanalysis of Tongan society to incorporate European-derived institutional complexes into a Tongan cultural construction of social hierarchy.

Not only do patterns of use reflect such a reanalysis, but they also reveal how much subtlety and variability there is to the ideology of social hierarchy in practice compared with the simplicity of the metapragmatic analysis represented in the word lists.

At the same time we see that the sacred associations of the words used for the Tu'i Tonga are present today in the restriction of extensions of kingly words to God and Jesus only. And we also see that in practice the traditional subtle gradings among chiefs lost in the legal creation of the category of Noble exist today in practice.

The fluidity in the use of noble terms, compared with the restrictedness of the use of kingly terms cannot be overemphasised. It is this difference that is most at odds with the metapragmatic representation of the three speech levels as analogously separate and distinct from one another. There are a number of ways of interpreting this difference, none of which I am confident in. First, it is clear that the Royal Family enjoys the respect and love of the Tongan people in a way that truly sets them apart from everyone else, which cannot be said of the Nobility, whose special status has been, since the creation of that special category, problematic. A pattern of usage that does not set them apart very clearly from the Commoners is consistent with their problematic status. But in addition, although at present I lack clear evidence of historical change in the use of these terms, a case can also be made for a general levelling of Tongan society, and for a downward movement of noble terms analogous to the downward movement of high speech levels documented by Errington (1985). Many of the noble terms listed in Shumway and *Ko e Kalama* were reported to me and observed by me to appear not just in the formal speech of Tongans, but in everyday family household use as well.

A final issue to be addressed is the extent to which the separate Tongan metapragmatic conceptualisations of the relation between social hierarchy and language use are separate in practice. Here I argue that in practice, speech levels and the distinction between everyday language use and public performed verbal art, that are kept separate in Tongan talk about language use, are not always separate in actual language use itself. In practice, performed verbal art and the noble and kingly speech levels draw upon and give effectiveness and impact to one another. They mutually influence and empower one another.

Genres of verbal art draw upon words that are perceived to be noble words to enhance the beauty and persuasiveness of what is said. In the following example (12), I quote again from the Free Wesleyan prayer used earlier, now emphasising it as a good contemporary example of rhetorical performed Tongan. The words in bold print are words identified by several Tongan informants as noble words, but as will be evident, they are not the common words in previous examples, nor are they recognised in written sources as noble. Their rarity is seen as a testimony to the knowledge and skill of the speaker.

- (12) *mau kei **kai** 'utungaki he ngaahi lelei ko ia;*
*mau kei **tafesino**'ivai pea 'ūkuma ai 'a e ngaahi lelei katoa*
'oku mau pōlepole ai.
 we still live in **plenty**;
 we still live in **complete ease** enjoying pleasure yours by right with no hindrance
 of which we are proud.

I have formatted this excerpt to highlight the semantic and syntactic parallelism in these phrases to reveal their poetry-like qualities.

Reciprocally, many noble and kingly words themselves partake of the metaphorical qualities characteristic of the Tongan poetic tradition of performed verbal art. There are two general senses in which this is true. First, when we consider words that have both commoner and noble or kingly meaning, the relationship between those meanings reveals the often allusive, indirect, metaphorical and metonymic dimensions of the noble and kingly terms, dimensions we associate with poetry in many languages, including Tongan. For example, some of the kingly words associated with negative or unfortunate actions are commoner words which soften, deintensify or obscure what is being referred to. The kingly word for 'beat', which in commoner terms is *haha*, is *palai*, the commoner word for 'smudge'. The kingly word for 'drunk', which in commoner terms is *konā*, is *malahia*, the commoner word for 'misfortune from wrongdoing'. The kingly word for 'kill', which in commoner terms is *tamate'i*, is *feia*, a polite form of 'do'. The kingly word for 'spit on', which in commoner terms is *puhinga*, is *fakamokomoko*, which means 'to cool off'.

But in addition, there are some noble and kingly terms that are poetic in a more distinctly Tongan way, in that they draw upon natural imagery. For example, the commoner word for 'sky' is *langi*. *Langi* is the kingly word for 'bury', 'eye', 'face', 'head', and an element in the compound for 'eyeglasses', *langi-sio'ata*. *Langi* also has many mythical associations. The sky is the dwelling place of the gods. It is also the place from which early contact Europeans were thought to have come, as in *pālangi* 'European'. The commoner word *ma'afu* refers to a nebula configuration; it is the kingly word for 'burn'. The commoner word for 'gardenia' is *siale*, which is the root for the kingly word for 'white' *sialea*, as in white hair. In other words, these kingly words are commoner words for natural phenomena that stand for human attributes and actions when used to refer to the King, just as such natural phenomena stand for humans and their more historically noteworthy actions in the speeches of *mātapule* and the compositions of *punake*.

In sum, the different expressions of the cultural constitution of social hierarchy in Tonga are kept analytically distinct, and quite often they are kept separate in practice. It cannot be said, for example, that the newspaper writer, the Magistrate, or the Town Officer have been poetic in my examples of their use of noble terms.

However, these special forms of language use also merge, interpenetrate, and draw on one another for their power and effectiveness in many aspects of their expression.

4. CONCLUSION

For Tongans, talk about the existence and nature of Tongan speech levels and actual use of vocabulary identified by Tongans as associated with three distinct social categories are closely related but distinguishable ways of culturally constructing social hierarchy in Tonga.

Both have undergone change as the dominant interpretive framework for social hierarchy in Tonga has made a transition to nation-state. In the talk about practice, or metapragmatics of speech levels, there has been a transformation of the key social identities associated with the three levels from people, chiefs and the Tu'i Tonga to Commoners, Nobles and Kings. But at this level of analysis, only the key constitutional categories of Tongan modernity are in evidence. The continuing sacred character of Tongan kingly words manifest in practice is, however, obscured in the metapragmatic word lists. And the multiple and fluid sources of traditional and modern authority indexed by noble words manifest in practice cannot be retrieved from the rigidly tripartite analysis. Nor is it possible

to recognise from the word lists the way in which speech levels and the performance tradition are intertwined and draw upon one another, even as they are truly distinct in some ways.

Tongan metapragmatic analysis of speech levels is itself very Tongan as I see it. It is one of many ways the Tongans have of presenting the same model of their entire society to outsiders and to themselves: overtly and expressly hierarchical, comprehensible to Europeans, using European terms (king, noble, commoner), yet clearly linked to the Tongan pre-contact past in such a way that each legitimises the other.

At the same time, their metapragmatic analysis has much in common with the ways in which people who speak other languages in other cultures use and interpret their own languages and cultures. First, it focuses on the segmentable phenomena of words, which are more accessible to analysis than non-segmental aspects of language structure. Second, some particular aspects of practice are carved out and highlighted from all that is experientially merged. One could never know, for example, of the very strong egalitarian values in Tongan culture from this analysis, except indirectly from some of the extensions of noble terminology. Third, such constructs normativise or idealise linguistic phenomena which are more variable and complex behaviourally than the constructs suggest, as we have seen in language variationist research in the Labovian tradition. For example, Charles Ferguson argued some years ago that many languages have high and low varieties, a situation which he referred to as diglossic. These varieties were said to differ in both form and function in similar ways in unrelated languages. Yet recently diglossic varieties have been shown to be not sharply distinguished in linguistic form, but rather as differing in terms of the frequency of particular forms, that is, as variably rather than categorically different. And finally, such constructs idealise not only linguistic phenomena, but also sociocultural phenomena, not just overgeneralising, but also projecting a (self) image of society that gives salience to certain aspects of social ordering over others.

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