

## **Language structure from social practice**

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Our language is shaped by the world we inhabit. Some of our cues are environmental: tigers have stripes, green fruit is probably not ripe, a sudden noise means trouble. Most of them, however, are social. Human history is a history of communities and shared habits. Rituals and practices have a tremendous importance as exponents of accepted conventions. The influence of social practice, one way or another, have been well documented for individual linguistic traits such as category formation or grammaticalisation. Diachronic linguistics and variationist sociolinguistics have contributed to a broader view of language structure as a result of language change driven by individual practices in the community. Social practice is now also recognised as an important predictor in speech production and processing.

Using examples from my research, I give an overview of the ways in which social practice affects language structure on various levels. First, I use typological data collected with Fiona Jordan to look at the effect of marriage rules and social complexity on variation across kinship term systems. Second, based on work with Joe Blythe, I show how practices in name avoidance shape grammar in Murrinhpatha, an Australian Aboriginal language. Then I move on to the effect of our perception of the interlocutor, from my lab work with Jen Hay and Christoph Bartneck in New Zealand. Finally, I illustrate how our knowledge of social contexts shapes lexical processing in an online experimental task, citing work with Jen Hay, Janet Pierrehumbert and Clay Beckner.

These studies show the pervasive effect of social practice on language structure, from semantic categories to grammatical structures to low-level lexical processing. By drawing a connection across these domains, I advocate a view of language as a fundamentally social process, framed by the everyday practice of the individuals who use it.