

# Chief Communications: Communication and Cultural Practices among Samoan Matais

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## Abstract

Samoa and American Samoa provide researchers a unique opportunity to explore acculturation and intercultural communication practices. However, this region has been the focus of comparatively few studies. This case study of Samoan chiefs provides insight into the way a culture has adapted its discourse practices to include those who have immigrated to other countries. By comparing the structure, context, and function of chiefs' communication practices both in and out of Samoa, a picture of cultural adaptations emerges.

**Keywords:** Samoa, acculturation, cultural discourse analysis

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## Introduction

In 2007, a village in Savai'i, Samoa, feasted to celebrate the induction of a new *matai* (chief) in the village. When this chief returned home after the festivities, it was not to one of the *fales* (houses) in the village. Instead, he flew Air New Zealand across the world to the United States, returning to his home of 25 years.

This chief represents many Samoan and American Samoan immigrants who have gained titles while living in other countries. Samoan families initially sent young family members to other countries to work and build income and prestige for the family. Eventually these groups formed permanent enclaves of Samoans, often with mixed ethnicity (Macpherson 2004).

Evelyn Kallen (1982) called the connection between these enclaves and those living in the islands a kinship bridge and discussed the way this bridge has provided economic support to Samoa. Besides uncovering the economic incentives for this connection between immigrants and their country of origin, this bridge provides an opportunity to examine intercultural communication practices that are part of acculturation, the process of adapting to a new culture. The level of acculturation varies in individuals. However, "the overall acculturation process is universal across groups" (Neuliep 2006:416). In other words, moving to a new culture always involves adaptation.

Intercultural research often focuses upon the interactions between a host culture and a native culture to determine how individuals adapt. However, many immigrants also attempt to maintain ties with their native cultures. This action, connecting with native people and cultures, also deserves investigation. What adaptations occur between the immigrant and his or her native culture? What communication acts facilitate maintaining these ties to an individual's culture of origin?

When discussing possible intercultural research agendas, Robert Shuter (2008) called for intercultural researchers to look less at refining existing communication theories and instead to focus on culture. Samoa and American Samoa offer rich opportunities to examine communication practices of a culture. Within the islands of the Pacific, researchers find a stunning array of cultural diversity. As Robert Borofsky noted, however, "despite such notable academic assets, the Pacific appears to be one of the less academically noted regions of the world. Comparatively few study or publish on it" (Borofsky 2004:41).

One lens for analyzing these communication practices is cultural discourse analysis. Cultural discourse is a codified communication system with specific styles, symbols, and norms. A cultural group uses this

system, sharing its communication traditions among multiple generations (Carbaugh, Gibson & Milburn 1997). Cultural discourse analysis uncovers the ways this communication system is a cultural practice.

As discourse gets defined in multiple ways, researchers analyzing discourse use a variety of approaches and research methods. Discourse analysis can examine communication's grammar, style, rhetorical properties, semiotics, structure, genres, etc., as well as employ ethnographic techniques and experimentation (Van Dijk 2008). Researchers combine these approaches depending on their research agendas. However, "Most of the time such analysis will be qualitative descriptions of the details of discourse structure" (Van Dijk 2008:3).

When performing a cultural discourse analysis, the researcher should also be aware of the context for any communication act. Cultural discourse studies, therefore, move beyond linguistic analysis into a "study of action and interaction" (Wodak 2008: 4). Donal Carbaugh (2007) suggested three areas of focus for cultural discourse analyses: the function of communication in culture, the structure of communication and cultural practices, and the larger contexts for these practices. Each of these foci helps the researcher situate communication acts within the culture.

Analyzing the function, structure, and context of discourse prevents researchers from viewing the discourse autonomously. Instead, discourse can be grounded in its social situations and contexts. Van Dijk (2008) argued this type of analysis requires understanding social, cultural, historical, and political influences on communication.

Theo Van Leeuwen (2008) approached discourse with the idea that "all texts, all representations of the world and what is going on in it, however abstract, should be interpreted as representations of social practices" (Van Leeuwen 2008:5). He analyzed discourse according to how it drew on and transformed these social practices.

Viewing discourse as a social practice requires an understanding of the speakers themselves and important aspects of discourse situations. By situating discourse, researchers can reach new understandings of communication's function (Brown & Yule 1983; Wodak 2008). As researchers explore the function of communication, they uncover what people accomplish during various communication acts. Discourse can serve multiple functions such as transmitting information, emotions, or ideas or establishing and maintaining relationships (Brown & Yule 1983).

This article attempts to situate communication practices of a specific group within the Samoan culture, *matais*, comparing their practices in and out of Samoa. This case study of the function, structure, and contexts of Samoan *matais* provides a look at how a native culture has adapted to connect to communities in other countries.

## Research Methods

Large groups of Samoan immigrants exist in New Zealand, Hawaii, and in the Western United States. To begin studying the cultural transitions experienced by this population, I analyzed the limited number of available ethnographies on Samoa, performing what Shuter calls "pattern research" (2008). With this pattern research, I compiled a profile of the communication of the *matai* (chief) system in Samoa, the structural characteristics, communication contexts, and functional accomplishments. I then pursued the question, how do these communication practices, settings, and functions compare to the experiences of *matais* (chiefs) in immigrant enclaves?

This exploratory question lent itself to a qualitative research method, semi-structured interviews. To gain qualitative information on *matais* living outside of Samoa, I received IRB approval and interviewed six *matais* who had immigrated to the United States. These *matais* all belonged to a *matai* organization located in Utah and volunteered to speak with me after I contacted the organization. All six of the *matais* were fluent in both Samoan and English. Three of the participants received titles while they were still living in the islands and then immigrated to the United States. However, three of the participants had received titles after immigrating to the United States. The participants were *matai* for villages in both American Samoa and Samoa. I met with each *matai* in person for at least an hour and conducted interviews to gain what Wengraf (2001) referred to as depth.

For these interviews, I compiled a list of six open-ended questions that I asked all participants; however, I also asked unstructured follow up questions of participants to ensure I understood their answers. In two cases, I followed up with participants on the phone after our initial interviews to clarify their interview responses. The interviews occurred over a two month time span in June and July of 2008.

Interviews are more open-ended than a more formal survey, lacking predetermined response categories. This characteristic makes interviews ideal for obtaining large amounts of descriptive data. However, as Marshall and Rossman (1995) pointed out, interviews can be difficult, as they require participant cooperation and willingness to share. Interviews are also only appropriate when the researcher wants to describe the participants' ideas and perspectives about a topic.

To gain participants' insights, interviews proceed much like ordinary conversations. The researcher adjusts questions and asks follow up questions as appropriate to clarify the participants' responses. "Interviewers don't work out three or four questions in advance and ask them regardless of the answers to earlier questions. The interview, like an ordinary conversation, is invented anew each time it occurs" (Rubin & Rubin 1995:7).

Using the interview transcripts, I analyzed the participants' narratives using Carbaugh's cultural discourse analysis categories: functional accomplishments, structural characteristics, and communication context.

### **Overview of the *Matai* System**

Due to colonialism, Samoa is now actually two political states: the Independent State of Samoa (formerly Western Samoa) and the United States Territory of Eastern Samoa (known by its inhabitants as American Samoa). Both Samoa and American Samoa are part of the Pacific Islands, which are comprised of a thousand distinctive peoples (Oliver 1989). Many discussions lump all of Polynesian peoples and cultures into a single entity, synthesizing perceived commonalities among the various cultures of the Pacific islands. However, when looked at individually, these cultures each have distinct communication practices.

Much of Samoa's history is known only through legends and oral traditions. In 1900, the United States annexed American Samoa (islands of Manu'a), and Germany took control of Samoa (islands of Savai'i and Upolu). During World War I, New Zealand took control of Samoa from Germany, and in 1962, Samoa again became an independent nation (Siers 1970). During these periods of colonialization, Samoans began immigrating to New Zealand and parts of the United States (Kallen 1982).

Before this colonialization by other countries, both Samoa and American Samoa followed the same political structure: the *matai* system. This system has evolved, but it still exists in both nations (Kallen 1982). The word *matai* is used multiple ways in the Samoan language. It refers literally to any person who holds a title, but it also can refer to a group of title holders (the *matai*). Surviving Samoan oral traditions discuss chiefs and this chief system of governance, outlining the sometimes violent rivalries that occurred over chief titles. This system has undergone changes through American and German occupation, New Zealand control, independent government in Samoa, and migrating Samoan populations.

The *matai* system acts as the key component of *fa'asamoa*, the Samoan way of life. Despite the initial appearance that this system must of necessity only exist within the main political body of Samoa, *matais* exist in the enclaves of Samoans located in other countries.

### **Comparing Matai Communication Systems in and out of Samoa**

In keeping with Carbaugh's cultural discourse analysis topics (2007), I analyzed the narratives of six immigrant *matais*. Based upon interviews and pattern research, I will analyze the functional accomplishments of Samoan *matais*, discussing how they connect Samoan immigrants to the islands. I will then discuss structural characteristics of the Samoan *matai* system and its unique form of communication, the respect language, comparing this structure in and out of Samoa.

Finally, I will discuss the larger communication contexts surrounding this system, determining when formal and interpersonal communication acts occur among *matais* in the islands and in other countries.

### ***Functional Accomplishments***

Pili, a chief of Samoan legend, figures prominently in many Samoan stories and is usually attributed magical powers. In one legend, Pili was going to provide Upolu with an improved political structure:

When Pili saw, that the time had come to provide for a better government, he called his sons together to give them their appointments (tofiga).

In accordance with the last will (mavaega) of Pili, Tua became the founder of Atua, i.e. the eastern part of Upolu. As emblem of his destination, the old man gave him a planting stick ('oso), as a sign that he is expected to do the work.

Ana became the founder of A'ana, i.e. the western part of Upolu. To indicate that he and his district were to form the warparty, he gave him as emblem a club and a spear - the signs of a warrior.

Tumasaga was to stay in the center of Upolu, between Atua and A'ana. He was given a staff and a fue which ever since have been the insignia of a talking chief (Holmes & Holmes 1992: 27).

This legend exemplifies the important function *matais* play in Samoan culture: using rhetorical prowess to unify the people. *Matais* still carry a staff and *fue* (fly whisk), and they still function as unifiers and the voice of the people, particularly of families.

Participants I interviewed displayed their staffs and fly whisks prominently in their homes, mentioning that they still use them on local gatherings with other Samoans. Most of these gatherings, however, involve culture shows and fairs, and these *matais* have little opportunity to use them for orating in decision-making meetings and ceremonies.

Besides participating in these formal ceremonies and events, *matais* serve an important role of unifying families, villages, districts, and the country. They also ensure people under their jurisdiction are physically taken care of, distributing wealth among all of these people. The chiefs located in the island regularly oversee and distribute goods among those in their charge. *Matais* living elsewhere still contribute financially to the village. Each participant described different methods of sending financial support to the village. For example, one participant mentioned sending \$20 a month to "show you are supporting—help feed people and keep up the village and land."

*Matais* speak for their families, using specific protocols and receiving wealth they distribute to the village for their efforts. *Matais* living in the United States, however, must depend upon surrogates to fulfill this role, providing a representative with their input and relying on this representative to provide this input persuasively and effectively.

In all of these ceremonies and circumstances, the *matais* attempt to guide and protect their extended family, making sure the family's physical needs get met. In this way, the *matai*, and their ritualistic communication, serves to unite families, villages, and culture. While Samoan *matais* living away from the islands have more limited access to formal ceremonies, they still function in a unifying role. In fact, they serve to unify their families across countries and continents, making sure their family's needs are met. As one participant put it:

The *matai* system is actually family oriented—it's always family. You know I grew up most of my life in America, and our system back home, whether you get married, you still living as a family at home . . . You take care of the elderly until they passed away. And it doesn't matter if you're married and have four kids, you're still living with your mom and your dad, but you have different houses. Your dad will have a house here and brother will have a house here and your sisters and her husband and they all live together. . . It's all about family.

*Matais* both in and out of Samoa provide a bridge for other Samoan immigrants, linking them to their heritage. Through an adapted *matai* system, Samoans receive economic support from those living outside the country. Those living in other countries can retain land rights and cultural privileges, which encourages their descendents to continue to return to Samoa.

The function of *matai* communication changes in this adapted *matai* system. Rather than using oratorical abilities to gain authority and ethos, *matais* use proxies to establish and maintain familial relationships across borders.

### ***Structural Characteristics***

The *matai* structure has remained a consistent part of the Samoan culture. The structure has, however, adapted as Samoans have moved to other countries and participated in other cultures.

Multiple types of titles exist in the *matai* system. These titles fall into two basic categories: high chiefs and talking chiefs. A high chief (*ali'i*) inherits his title. *Ali'i* translates to mean Lord, which is significant because this hereditary title implies divine right and authority for the titleholder.

In contrast, the talking chief (*tulafale*) earns his title by demonstrating oratorical skills. The *tulafale sili* acts as the principal village orator. In this role, he acts as the ambassador to those visiting the village and is responsible for intervillage politics. He also helps distribute wealth—food, fine mats, and other property—among the village. "The High Talking Chief's skill at persuasion is often so great that few individuals except the High Chiefs dare oppose him. In village council meetings, it can be said that he sets the agenda and is often responsible for placing motions before the assembly" (Holmes & Holmes 1992:37).

Four of the participants in this study held *ali'i* titles, and two held *tulafale* titles. Both *tulafales*, however, had received their titles while still living in Samoa.

Keesing and Keesing compared the two types of titles, noting the high chief was "the exalted, ceremonious, supernaturally tinged, ultimately powerful and responsible leader—elite in its full sense—while the talking chief is the 'steward,' brain-truster, and executive to the chief and his adherent group, and the mental storehouse for memories and traditions, the custodian of group knowledge, the lawyer-like manipulator of words" (Keesing & Keesing 1956:40).

While the high chief is responsible for the day-to-day concerns of his people as well as important ceremonies relating to his title, a talking chief also provides leadership in practical matters and aids high chiefs (Kallen 1982:37).

Each village also has unique structural differences. Among titleholders in the same class (such as two men with a *tulafale* title), a rank system exists, and this rank system is known by titleholders and is acknowledged during formal meetings.

The rank of a *matai's* title impacts his ethos and ability to impact village and inter-village politics. One participant described this impact as having a "voice":

If you don't have a title, you don't go to meetings. Not everyone has a right to say opinions. Each *matai* can say opinions to the village. That's the main purpose of the *matai*—to be the voice of the village to improve the living in the village.

*Matais* represent and lead their extended families and local villages. They also participate in district (multiple villages) politics and represent the village for the entire nation (Mead 1928; Keesing & Keesing 1956; Stair 1897).

Being either a high chief or a talking chief gives the titleholder an opportunity to share his opinions. While both types of titleholders can choose to speak, often a high chief designates a talking chief to speak for him.

Most oral societies have a specific word that means "orator" with men who excel at speaking in political settings. In these oral cultures, the opportunity to become an orator differs, as does the role of the orator. These orators must have ethos before they speak and their ethos must be regularly reinforced by their speaking abilities (Kennedy 1998). *Matais* regularly reinforce their ethos through their oratorical abilities.

*Matais*, particularly the talking chiefs, must be experts using both the common language and the respect language (*upu fa'aaloalo*). This language is also referred to as the Chief's language. It is comprised of specific respectful words that a chief uses when addressing another chief (Holmes & Holmes 1992:14). Chiefs refer to themselves in common words, using the respect language to address others. Therefore, in a speech, a chief must be able to move nimbly between these two distinct languages.

The unique sets of nouns and verbs that form the respect language are accompanied by specific gestures and procedures. For example, when visiting another village, a talking chief would engage in an elaborate recitation, listing names of important people and locations in the village (Mead 1928:76). *Matais* also use language, stories, and formal recitations to understand others' views on community events and values and to express their own stance as well (Duranti 1994).

When mastering the chief language, *matais* must learn legends, proverbs, and orally passed down historical events. Their artful use of language allows them to form arguments, define relationships, and establish and reinforce social values and traditions, as well as to reinforce their own ethos through their eloquent expressions. In their careful selection of language to achieve these purposes, they must know a complex web of societal rules and relationships of power, which they must list in specific ways.

Fewer opportunities exist for *matais* in the United States to participate in these language rituals, and instead, their family members still living in Samoa must represent their opinions. One participant described his interaction in his village's important decision of who should be the new high chief for the entire village, as the old high chief—the participant's father—had recently passed away:

I pretty much gave them who I felt like should be the next chief of the family, so the only thing I'm waiting on right now is when the family gets together and decides who that person is going to be. Then I want to go out there and be a part of that celebration to ratify his name and the title.

But I pretty much said, "Hey, instead of me coming out twice—it costs a lot of money—I'll just fly down one time, but you know, this is the person that I'll support." But at the same time if the family gets together and decides somebody else, then we have to be behind that person and support him. That's the way we do things.

While this *matai* still shared his opinion in an important village decision, he did not have the opportunity to gain ethos through artful use of the respect language. He lost his opportunity to persuade through his skillful arguments and must now rely on a proxy to represent his opinions effectively. As more chiefs live outside of the village, the respect language and its importance in village life could recede.

### ***Communication Context***

For men living in the islands or in the United States, the process of obtaining a *matai* title is similar. In both cases the extended family determines who receives the title. Titles are considered family property and get conferred upon men for life (Holmes & Holmes 1992:29).

A *matai* in Samoa usually lives with his immediate family as well as an assortment of extended family members both adopted and natural, and the extended family lives in close proximity to each other.

In both Samoa and immigrant enclaves, the extended family bestows a title on its head of household. The family also awards its lesser titles to various family members. Although each family has a title to bestow, not all of the titles are equal, and some families have more prestigious titles than others. Each village has multiple families and therefore multiple titleholders. Villages are associated through various family relationships and titles.

This title bestowal process leads Samoans to pay close attention to genealogy, and they can trace their relationships to dozens of differing groups. While the male branches of the family are considered more eligible to receive titles, the female branches of the family receive special privileges and deference and can also receive titles. These separate gender considerations warrant additional study.

One participant discussed his connection to an extended family network on both his mother and father's sides of the family. Maintaining these connections enabled him to receive a title from his mother's side of the family over twenty years after moving to the United States.

Although the son of a *matai* has a good chance of receiving the title, a young man who lives in the household of the *matai* could also receive the title, particularly if the blood relatives live in other households. Moving among households is a common practice, and this practice provides men additional title opportunities. Outside of the United States, Samoan men must maintain relationships with multiple households, often through sending regular monetary help, in order to gain these title opportunities.

When selecting men to receive the titles, families meet in extended deliberations that can last from days to weeks. In the case of Samoans outside of the country, these deliberations often occur without the candidate present. One of the candidates discussed this occurring before he received his title:

I just went to Samoa last year, and I had a title from my mother's side of the family, from the big island of Savai'i. Of course they had to discuss that matter before I came over. So they all knew who wanted to be in that particular title, to be a *matai*. So there were six of us, and out of that six, the whole family—the family is a very important thing here—because the whole family has to agree who to grant the title to and who cannot have the title.

Both in the islands and in the Utah immigrant population, the family must decide who receives a title. However, for a title to have actual meaning, it must be registered officially in Samoa or American Samoa. Those living in Utah return to Samoa for the family ceremony to receive their titles. Three of the *matais* I interviewed described knowing others in the immigrant community who had received titles without the family in Samoa electing them, calling these titles meaningless. One participant described it this way:

The thing is lots of other people they just come here and they give the title to other people because they want to get money. But, what happens when someone has the title here and [is] not registered in Samoa; he's not a *matai*. Even though they [an *ali'i*] give him the title, they are only words. But as far as holding to the legal process, is nothing . . . the one who gives the title, he does not have the sole authority to give the *matai*. They are also part of the family there. So the others also did not get involved. They say, "Okay we did not participate in that thing. He is not the only one who has the right to confer the *matai*. Our voice should be heard."

For a title to be official, then, a Samoan male living outside of the United States who wishes to receive a title must still be nominated by the family and return to Samoa.

Both types of *matais*—talking chiefs and high chiefs—receive their titles based upon numerous factors including age, education, ability, heredity, and wealth. "[T]he *matais* as a class tend to be an elite in psychological as well as status terms. The quietly dignified, decisive person will tend to be given a chief's title, while the 'lawyer-like,' fluent-speaking person will quickly be spotted as a 'natural' for a talking chief" (Keesing & Keesing 1956:45).

These criteria also remain in force for immigrant Samoans interested in gaining titles. Those I interviewed expressed particularly the need for appropriate finances in order to gain a title:

In my case, back in 1994, when I went to Samoa, we went and got our titles. My dad was getting old. If we don't get titles, we would lose the recognition of our family names. . . I didn't know anything about it [*matais*] until my dad explained. We took a lot of money with us. We killed four cows, gave out money and food. Two other villages nearby came too. They came because of food—it was like a big wedding party—1,000 people. You give to everybody—to be recognized; that is how you do it.

While gaining a title can be expensive, it also brings certain privileges. Being a *matai* can include privileges such as a house name, the right to bestow a *taupo* title upon a single female relative, or the right to award a *manaia* title upon a promising young male. *Matais* also control the land owned by their families. Those living outside of Samoa often decide to receive a title to retain control of land for their family. One chief described claiming the land of a family who had not returned to keep its title:

Property and titles are connected. Chiefs will claim unclaimed land. Then families return and want the land back, but the land is already registered under a new chief. My dad defended a lot of land we got because my grandpa was the main chief and he claimed it. Other people remembered their ancestry and had the land back in the 1800s. They wanted the land back. They no longer have it. According to the government, it's under our name.

The privileges of a title still exist for those who live in the United States, but the opportunities to exercise these privileges are sparse and must occur through surrogates still living in the title-holder's village. Each of the participants mentioned a family member who represented their interests in Samoa. For example, one chief discussed sending his wishes to his niece:

So when I do have something I send it to this person, which is my sister's daughter and her husband. So I send her something [money] to help them along and also because they're taking care of the need in the village.

Even though I'm here, but I still send something because every Monday they call a village council together. So they always do things. If something like a funeral happens in the village, then the family will give the village something. Let's say they give the village five cows, and then they divide it up for every *matai* in the village. And my portion is going to go to my sister's daughter and her husband because they are the ones that are going to take care of my dues in the village. It's all family oriented. Even in the village, the whole village, they get something and they all portion, every chief and then they all share it with their family.

These proxies represented the immigrant *matai* at important occasions. Traditionally, *matais* employ rhetorical prowess on these occasions, both formal events—visiting ceremonies, discussion and leadership deliberations, religious meetings, judicial deliberations—and interpersonal occasions.

Visiting ceremonies and judicial and leadership deliberations all occur in a *falefono*, a large building in the center of the village. These ceremonies are held outside in the morning hours, before the heat of the island became too intense. At the ceremonies, the chiefs decide upon village and district affairs.

Kava, a beverage made from the kava plant, is an important part of formal Samoan meetings and must be prepared and served in specific ways by specific people. A talking chief calls out when the kava is prepared, using a specific speech (Hart 1996:29). *Matai* living in the United States still have limited opportunities to participate in kava ceremonies when the *matais* meet in the organization they have formed and when Samoan dignitaries visit.

When chiefs meet, they drink kava before any discussion or decision-making. A *tulafale*, or talking chief, supervises its preparation and then calls the order of precedence for distributing the drink. This order shows the rank of all of the assembled *matai*. When determining the order that assembled *matai* drink the kava, the *tulafale* has an opportunity to deliver subtle taunts as well as bestow honor upon those assembled (Keesing & Keesing 1956:72).

*Matais* living outside of Samoa send representatives to these formal meetings, only participating in the customary ceremonies during visits to their villages or when dignitaries visit them in the United States. One participant described talking to his brother in Samoa at least once a week to give his brother his opinions for any decision-making meetings:

My brother calls us every week. He tells us if there are any differences of opinions in lands or titles. . . If we need to, we [his family living in the United States] type up our opinion and fax it to my brother.

These meetings adhere to specific customs. Only specific leaders are able to address the assembly, and those speakers stressed the privilege of addressing the group. When engaged in discussions within the *falefono* (meeting house), the *matai* wishing to be heard, when appropriate based upon his rank and experience, flicks his whisk from shoulder to shoulder three times from his seated position and then begins his oration. If the meeting is held in the open in the *malae*, he stands grasping his staff and then proceeds with his fly whisk. However, with *matais* faxing and phoning opinions to representatives, this protocol becomes more fluid.

Besides having a general order for addressing people, interpersonal occasions have specific protocols. For example, a mother with a new baby, a visit to a sick person, a funeral, or a religious gathering all require different, specific order for addressing people. These interpersonal events are important rhetorical occasions for *matais* as they attempt to keep their household happy, working, and running smoothly.

Keeping family members happy becomes particularly important to *matais* because of the flexible nature of the Samoan family. Unhappy family members can leave families at will and join themselves to other distant relatives. This endless choice of leadership for family members encourages *matais* to keep their family members happy. The rhetorical prowess of *matais* must often be employed to encourage family members to perform needed labor.

This flexibility, however, is less available to family members living in the United States, as they are often separated from their extended families and can no longer easily move their possessions to another home in the village or a neighboring village. While those living in the United States can not switch *matais* as easily, they are also more likely to be living at a distance from their *matai* and therefore use the *matai* in the family for primarily financial or physical support, without necessarily needing to follow the *matai*'s council or rules.

One *matai* living in Utah felt he had a busier time as a *matai* living in Utah than he would if he had remained in Samoa. His father had been the highest ranking *ali'i* in the village and had bestowed a lesser *ali'i* title on him. In Samoa, his father had taken care of the extended family and continued to do so when he and many of his siblings immigrated, but he now took care of the extended family who had immigrated to the United States:

Sometimes I feel like I have less responsibility in the islands than here in American [sic]. Because I have family up in Seattle—I have sisters all over the place—there's 18 of us—so I have in California, in Seattle, in Hawaii, so every time they have weddings, funerals, stuff like that, then they call me and I have to go take care of all those stuff. So that's my responsibility here. Sometimes the wife kind of complains, like, "Hey, make sure they pay your way." But it comes with the title. If you're willing to take that responsibility then you got to make sure you have enough to support yourself. You can't rely on the family.

Important interpersonal occasions abound for *matai* in the United States. Besides the traditional occasions presided over by *matai* in Samoa, Western occasions often get swept into these traditions. For example, one *matai* discussed flying to California to preside over a nephew's Eagle court of honor: "As a matter of fact, I went to California one time, just for an Eagle scout, but I saw some big fine mats. I was like, Wow, that's great!"

Thus the emphasis on interpersonal rhetorical occasions increases while the number of formal occasions decreases for immigrant *matai*. This change could ultimately decrease the oral prowess of *matais* and reduce the ceremonial nature of the culture.

## Conclusion & Future Research

*Matai* titles in the Samoan political and cultural system serve several important functions. In the islands, *matais* have long had political authority and served to perpetuate culture and unify people. However, the practice of allowing Samoan immigrants and their children to come to Samoa and receive titles acts as an important mechanism in providing ongoing economic support to those in Samoa, perpetuating Samoan culture among immigrant populations, and providing a familial support system to those who have immigrated.

While immigrant *matais*' opportunities to participate in formal ceremonies and cultural events is restricted, these *matais* still engage in interpersonal rhetorical activities, keeping family members connected across multiple geographic regions.

All six of the *matais* I interviewed have already, or plan to in the future, taken their children to Samoa to receive titles, passing along this sense of cultural responsibility and concern.

As one participant said, "Yes, I will [pass a title on to his children]. The main reason why is because my dad is working so hard getting the land—I don't want to give that away. You never know when those kids want to return back to the island. At least there is a place for them."

This practice protects their land inheritances in Samoa and keeps them sending economic help to the extended family still living in Samoa, creating an economic and cultural bond.

By adapting a long-standing, important part of the culture (the *matai* system), Samoans have bridged their culture over international borders, providing economic support to their islands and allowing immigrants to maintain land and social status with their native people. With this bridge has come a change in the communication and rhetorical practices of the *matai*. No longer do all *matai* provide a direct voice for their families and villages, building their ethos through their oral performances. Instead immigrant *matais* use economic means to build ethos and share their opinions through proxies, who may or may not have their own titles. This subtle shift in the Samoan representative "voice" bears long term study. How will this change impact the status and role of *matais* and their people? What role does and will technology play in this cultural shift? Who else might be given a voice as this shift continues?

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