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**Codeswitching, Translanguaging and Semiotic Repertoires of Tibetan Signers in Lhasa:
Betwixt and Between Tibetan and Chinese Sign Systems**

Theresa HOFER
(University of Bristol, UK)

ABSTRACT

Several theoretical approaches try to account for the fact that deaf communities are essentially multilingual communities: deaf people are often fluent in aspects of spoken, signed and/or written languages; they might use more than one signed language; and by choice or circumstance they need to communicate much of their time with hearing people who tend not to sign, or don't sign very well. Yet such constant border crossings between languages and modes – the lived language experience of so many deaf people – are not easily documented through conventional methods in signed or spoken language linguistics, nor are they sufficiently theorized in either field. With exceptions, they have often been considered problematic, not least in controlled language experimentation and observational methods. In this lecture I wish to review some significant recent innovations in theorizing signers' use of this multiplicity of languages and modes. I will consider classic code-switching studies (Myers-Scotton 1997); translanguaging theory (García and Wei 2014; Otheguy, García and Reid 2015); and the novel opportunities arising from semiotic repertoires studies, which prominently include analysis of diverse signed communications (Kusters, Spotti, Swanwick and Tapio 2017). Thereafter, I will explore a broader frame, drawn from linguistic and social anthropology, whereby semiosis is taken to include all sign systems, including language. Application of this frame enables us to consider semiosis as multi-modal communication, in which different modes and codes are intentionally or unintentionally orchestrated to create coherence, or conversely its absence (Parkin, Pillen and Hofer 2018).

Using examples from my recent anthropological research with Tibetan signers in Lhasa, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, China, I will analyze these phenomena in the light of the above theoretical considerations. Instances of mixed Tibetan and Chinese sign language use, the place of so-called “spontaneous sign” (or “rang-jung lag-da”) within this practice, and of spoken and written Tibetan and Chinese – including “extensions” of these systems, such as in a combination of writing, visual art and emojis on screens – will be discussed. In the process we will witness interactions between deaf signers, between

deaf signers and hearing non-signers in markets, cafés, educational and home settings, as well as via social media.

In the spirit of this conference's aim, "for a better understanding of human language", my intention is to enrich our understanding of human language in society – through presenting new ethnographic work, and by theoretically bridging relevant aspects of the disciplines of anthropology and of signed and spoken language linguistics.

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