



RECOVERING VOICES

Seminar Series
in Endangered Languages
and Indigenous Knowledge

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Thursday 11 October 2012

3:30 PM

NMNH, Rose Room

***Love Letters and Goodbyes in Nepal:
The Case for Linguistic Anthropology***

This talk analyzes some of the many social transformations that the village of Junigau, Nepal, has experienced over the past several decades and demonstrates the benefits of close attention to language for analyzing social change. Focusing on shifts in courtship and marriage practices, I show how the advent of female literacy led to an unanticipated switch from arranged and capture marriage to “love” marriage in the 1990s. Once Junigau women acquired literacy skills, one of the most common uses to which they put those skills was writing love letters – a practice that led to a dramatic transformation in marriage practices, kinship relations, and social dynamics more broadly in the village. I explore the social embeddedness of the village women’s literacy practices and analyze the contents of some of the 200+ Nepali love letters villagers shared with me. I then turn my attention to my current work in progress on the process of leave-taking in Nepal, examining farewell routines at the micro level and leave-taking at more macro levels in order to illustrate the benefits of linguistic anthropology for understanding cultural meanings and social relations



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