**Radiality at the Root of Polynesian Collectivism:**

**Representing and Expressing Quality Distinctions in Polynesian Languages**

The goal of this research is to investigate the mental organization and the linguistic expressions of quality distinctions in Polynesia, specifically in three Polynesian languages and cultures representing three major branches of the Polynesian language family: East Futunan, Tahitian, and Tongan. We hypothesize that Polynesian speakers focus on the primary qualities of objects when linguistically expressing quality distinctions. These qualities, such as extension, size and motion, do not depend on ego’s subjective perception, they are universal, objective by nature (and available to the collective). Secondary quality distinctions, typically appearances, are dependent on ego’s construction (perception/conception).

We propose to test the presence of radiality in organizing and expressing quality distinctions. Radiality is a foundational cultural model, a minimal organization of knowledge in several domains that represents a focus on other-than-ego and that consequently is at the root of collectivism. We hypothesize that this foundational cultural model participates in the choices made before the use of primary quality descriptors. If confirmed, this would support the claim that radiality is a cognitive and cultural principle used in distinguishing or describing objects among Polynesian speakers. Such a finding would support previous research identifying the centrality of radiality (and collectivism) in Polynesian culture and cognition.

Polynesians have been documented as collectivists or socio-centrists. Using Cultural Model Theory, the PI’s research on Tongan language and culture revealed a cognitive preference, defined as a foundational cultural model, for radiality—privileging other-than-ego—in several domains of knowledge (ontological primes) such as space, time, and relations (including kinship).

The presence of such a preference differs from individualism or egocentrism and dovetails with Polynesian collectivism or socio-centrism. In fact, privileging other-than-ego—the fundamental feature of radiality—is the cognitive posture that makes the construction of collectivism possible. This project seeks to corroborate the suggested collectivism in the wider Polynesia region with empirical cognitive and linguistic evidence from three Polynesian languages and cultures. Our assumption is that by examining linguistic behavior one can arrive at specific cognitive preferences that participate in the construction of that behavior.

The proposed research tests the hypothesis of radiality in Tongan and expand the investigation to other two Polynesian languages and cultures, East Futunan and Tahitian. Confirming radiality in all three cases, representing different branches of the Polynesian language family, would offer a foundation for the argument that radiality is a salient feature of Polynesian languages and cultures. In fact, Tongans, as well as East Futunans and Tahitians, may prefer radiality in mental representations and linguistic expressions of quality (distinctions), an ontological prime. If supported, this hypothesized feature would point to collectivism as a cognitive posture in Polynesia.

**Intellectual Merit.**

The results of the research project contribute substantially to three areas of investigation: 1. Oceanic linguistic, by expanding our knowledge about commonalities in Polynesian languages in expressing and mentally representing quality distinctions; 2. Anthropology (linguistic and cognitive), psychology (cognitive and cultural), and sociology, by providing empirical support for Polynesian collectivism or socio-centrism; 3. Cultural model theory, by refining our knowledge about the role cultural models play in human cognition and behavior (linguistic).

**Broader Impacts.**

The successful completion of this project may foster a renewed interest in research on quality distinctions in Polynesian languages. The presence of a foundational cultural model across Polynesian ontological primes would support the fundamental role that space plays in the construction of human cognition. The findings can be used to join the discussion about the original findings of a late developmental onset (later than the expected 4-6 years of age) of Theory of Mind in the Pacific. The large ontological distribution of radiality in Polynesia may be applied to educational settings. In fact, this cognitive characteristic may be used to facilitate learning experiences, if taken into consideration when planning and implementing school curricula and practices. Finally, students and members of the communities investigated contribute at various stages of the research project.