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A reader has asked us to discuss Māori English. It so happens that Andreea Calude and I were recently asked to write on this for an *Encyclopedia of World Englishes*.

Today I focus on pronunciation. Next week Andreea will cover structure and vocabulary.

We cannot discuss Māori English (ME) without first saying what we mean, since it is a term that linguists use but which has relatively little salience in the general population. Early references describe it as English with a Māori-influenced pronunciation or spoken mainly by Māori children learning English as a second language.

By the 1990s, as it spread to more speakers, many of whom were monolingual speakers of New Zealand English (NZE), ME was recognised by linguists as a legitimate variety of NZE, rather than an outcome of second language learning processes.

Importantly, it was acknowledged that the influence of te reo Māori might be indirect or historical, since many ME speakers were not fluent in te reo. It was also recognised that ME was not spoken only by people with Māori ethnicity, since



Māori English is claimed to have a characteristic "machine-gun" rhythm, heard in recordings of comedian Billy T. James.

Māori English, eh?

Language Matters

many Pākehā speakers adopt some of its characteristics.

Indeed, a good predictor of the likelihood of producing ME features has proved to be a Māori "orientation index", which reflects a speaker's social and family networks as much as their ethnicity.

Both ME and Pākehā English should be considered legitimate varieties of New Zealand English (NZE), sharing many of the characteristic pronunciation features of NZE. These include those vowel pronunciations that often confuse non-New Zealanders, such as the loss of the

vowel contrast in words like *beer* and *bear*, or the "shift" in the vowels in words like *pan* and *pen* that make them sound to British ears like *pen* and *pin* respectively.

There are relatively few features that are more characteristic of ME. Some are general voice quality differences; for example, perceptual studies have shown that ME is associated with creakier voices.

It is also claimed that ME has a characteristic rhythm, which can be heard for instance in recordings of comedian Billy T. James. Oversimplifying somewhat, we can characterise languages as syllable-timed, with a "machine-gun" rhythm in which all syllables are of relatively equal duration (eg. French or

Māori), or as stress-timed, with a "morse-code" rhythm in which syllables can be long or short, with the longer ones generally the stressed syllables that carry the rhythmic beat, as in the English words *reSPONSiBility* or *CIRcumNAViGation*.

While NZE has been identified as more "syllable-timed" than, say, British English, this is particularly true of ME. This is an historical influence of te reo which has helped give ME its identity.

Some differences in individual sounds are stronger in older speakers and bilingual Māori/English speakers, suggesting again an indirect influence of te reo.

For instance, while general NZE has vowels in words like *fish* and *chips* that Australians describe as *fush* and *chups*, ME has vowels not very different from the Australian *feesh* and *cheeps*.

This is an influence not of Australian English, but rather of the te reo vowel sound represented by the letter "i" in written Māori. Similarly, /t/ sounds, particularly at the beginnings of words, are not heavily aspirated in ME. That is, they do not have a strong puff of air following them. This puff of air helps keep the /t/ sound distinct from /d/ in English, but this is not needed in te reo Māori, which has no /d/ sound.

So while linguists recognise a ME accent, its distinctiveness largely involves the relative strengths of general NZE features. Check back next week for evidence from vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Contact us

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THE IRISH TIMES

Dealing with Covid needs compromise

Views from around the world. These opinions are not necessarily shared by *Stuff* newspapers.

The hospitality industry has been among the worst affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many in the industry were forced to close for long periods, laying off staff and in some cases going out of business altogether. Last week some businesses, including night clubs and music venues, reopened for the first time in more than 18 months. But relief has been tempered by rapidly worsening trends, with Covid case numbers and hospital admissions rising significantly.

The Government has attempted to maintain as many restrictions as possible without making it unviable for businesses to reopen. The resulting hotchpotch of restrictions and protocols has

Viewpoint

become the focus of debate. But to expect that there will be no inconsistencies rather misses the point.

At many stages in the pandemic, it has been Government policy, based on public health advice, to differentiate between settings depending on the nature of mixing that takes place there and the needs of individual businesses. The overall aim is to keep opportunities for disease transmission as low as possible without allowing businesses go to the wall. On paper the more sensible precautionary step would be to halt the reopening of indoor gathering spaces entirely. It may yet come to that if current trends persist, but for now differentiation – and, yes, some inconsistency – is the compromise.