Māori English

The number of fluent, native Māori language speakers has steadily decreased in New Zealand, and English has become the dominant language of almost all Māori people, although many are also familiar with the Māori language. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that a distinctive variety of Māori English has emerged to express ethnic identity and positive attitudes toward Māori culture (Holmes 2005).

King (1993) points out that what most sociolinguists would call New Zealand English (NZE) is probably better labelled as Pākehā English, that is, the English spoken mainly by European New Zealanders. In fact, NZE covers many varieties,
including both Pākehā English and Māori English. King also suggests that Māori English is not restricted to ethnically Māori speakers, but is also used by some Pākehā who either grew up or identify with Māori peer groups. It is also the case that not all ethnically Māori speak Māori English.

Previous research has suggested that the differences between Māori English and Pākehā English tend to be relative rather than absolute. There are many features that are shared by both dialects but where the frequency of forms in each variety differs. Since the 1990s, linguists working on Māori English have made numerous attempts to identify the core features that differentiate the two dialects, at least quantitatively if not qualitatively. Some of these studies concentrated on phonological features, such as the pronunciation of vowels and consonants (e.g., King 1993, Robertson 1994, Holmes 1996, Bell 2000), while others set out to identify possible prosodic differences (e.g., Bauer 1994, Holmes and Ainsworth 1996, Holmes and Ainsworth 1997, Warren 1998, Bell 2000). Some of the linguistic features of Māori English that have been
identified so far are described below.

Final /z/ devoicing

Devoicing of word final /z/ by young Māori children was noted as early as 1966 by Benton (Benton 1966). More recent research confirmed that it has developed into an identifiable feature of Māori English, with Māori speakers using a higher percentage of the devoiced variant than non-Māori. Bell (2000) claims that devoicing of /z/ is part of stereotypical representations of Māori English, producing for example a lengthened [s:] in `boys'.

Initial /t/ non-aspiration

In Holmes and Ainsworth's (1996) study there was a significant difference in the frequency with which Pākehā and Māori speakers used unaspirated word initial /t/. The Māori participants used the non-aspirated variant more than seven times as often as did the Pākehā participants. The results in Bell (2000) confirm this tendency. It is worth noting that the Māori language itself traditionally has a relatively unaspirated /t/, although this seems to be changing under the influence of English (Bauer 1997).

Stopping, affrication and fronting of /T/ and /D/

Bell (2000) suggests that in the case of Māori English variants of /T/ and /D/, there is a confluence of Māori language influence and general vernacular usage, as shown in other varieties such as African American English. The Māori speaker in Bell's study uses higher frequencies of the stopped, affricated and fronted variants than the Pākehā speaker. The fronted variants [f] and [v] in particular seem to be currently becoming more salient features of Māori English.

Fronting of /u/

In NZE /u/ seems to have a generally centralised realisation. However, Bell (2000) shows that his Māori speaker uses an extreme fronted version more than twice as often (38% of the time) than does the Pākehā speaker, and only produces 6% of the back token.

Syllable-timing

Although English in general is considered to be stress-timed, it has been suggested that NZE shows a tendency towards syllable-timing. Previous work on rhythm in New Zealand has also claimed that there may be a difference in timing patterns within the variety, with Māori speakers producing more syllable-timed speech than Pākehā speakers (Ainsworth 1993, Holmes and Ainsworth 1996, Holmes and Ainsworth 1997, Warren 1998). In fact, various patterns that signal a greater degree of syllable-timing were already noted in the speech of Māori children by Benton (1966). These include shortening of long vowels or diphthongs, devoicing and lengthening of consonants and use of full vowels for schwa in unstressed syllables.

To investigate the degree of syllable-timing in NZE, an auditory analysis of recordings from radio broadcasts was carried out by Ainsworth (1993) where she measured full-vowel vs. reduced-vowel ratio. The recordings were obtained from the BBC World News, two commercial New Zealand stations, the more conservative National Radio and the Māori news service, Mana News. Her results revealed that full vowels were retained nearly 60% of the time in the Māori sample, and only around 20% in the case of the recordings from the BBC and the two commercial New Zealand stations. In a detailed acoustic analysis of these recordings, Warren (1998) confirmed that Māori English is more syllable-timed than Pākehā English, which in turn is more syllable-timed than British English. In an acoustic analysis of the speech of 36 New Zealanders, Szakay (2008) also found that these two ethnic varieties displayed differing rhythmic patterns, with Māori English being significantly more syllable-timed than Pākehā English.

High Rising Terminals

The High Rising Terminal (HRT) is a salient rise in pitch at the end of non-interrogative intonation phrases and is a feature of many varieties of English. It has been extensively studied in NZE, and is reported to be used mainly by young, female speakers. A major study carried out by Britain (1992) showed evidence that this pattern is used in different proportions by Māori and Pākehā. His analysis indicated that Māori speakers use a significantly higher percentage of HRTs than Pākehā. The results also revealed that young Māori men use levels similar to women, while young Pākehā men are extremely low users of HRTs. Szakay (2008) also found that Māori speakers used a higher percentage of High Rising Terminals than Pākehā speakers.

Pitch

The results of Szakay's (2008) acoustic analysis suggested that Māori English pitch is becoming higher over time, with young Māori speakers producing a significantly higher mean pitch than young Pākehā speakers.

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