

The Changing Use of Maori Words in New Zealand English

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A living language is in a constant state of flux. While all areas of a language can change, change is most evident in vocabulary for 'it is the lexicon which reflects the culture and its speakers most closely' (Bynion, 1977: 216).

In an earlier article (Macalister, 1999), I discussed some of the changes in the presence of words of Maori origin in the New Zealand English lexicon from the 1960s to the 1990s. That discussion was grounded in a corpus-based study of the *School Journals*¹. The analysis revealed both established and changing patterns of use. The use of Maori proper nouns and Maori names for New Zealand's flora and fauna, for instance, is a practice of long-standing, which no doubt began in 1769. After all, when there is 'the need to find words for new objects, concepts, and places [i]t is easier to borrow an existing term from another language than to make one up' (Langacker, 1968: 177). However, in the New Zealand English of the 1990s, semantic distributional patterns have altered from those of the 1960s. While proper nouns of all sorts continue to account for almost two-thirds of the presence of Maori words in New Zealand English, *Tikanga Maori*/ General terms now account for a larger proportion of words of Maori origin than terms for plants and wildlife. These changing patterns support the idea of a 'strengthening of the Maori component' (Deverson, 1991: 21) in New Zealand English and confirm the perception of 'ongoing bilingual interchange' (Orsman, 1997: vii).

One of my conclusions in the earlier article was that analysis of 'the two corpora suggests a change in attitude to the Maori and the Maori world, with a shift from an historical and anthropological interest to a recognition of Maori as belonging to a living culture' (Macalister, 1999: 48-49). In this article, I propose to discuss this claim in greater detail.

1. The Significance of the Word *Maori*

To begin with, let us consider the significance of the word type *Maori*. The occurrence of the word *Maori* in the 1960s corpus was high, representing almost one sixth of the total number of Maori word tokens. Yet in the 1990s corpus *Maori* was an insignificant presence, accounting for roughly one-one hundredth of Maori word tokens. It is worth inquiring why this should be so.

Maori is typically used as a marker to identify difference. For example, the use of *Maori* in *the Maori Queen* immediately signals that the reference is not to

¹ This study would not have been possible without the co-operation of the editorial staff of the *School Journals*. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the support, encouragement and involvement of Patricia Glesnor.

the Queen. This is, of course, a perfectly legitimate and necessary use of the word, and one which Kennedy and Yamazaki (1999) found to be of high frequency in the *Wellington Corpus of Written New Zealand English*. In this respect, therefore, the 1990s corpus of the *School Journals* is not representative of current usage. However, while this difference in the two 1990s corpora may result from differences in text categories and topicality (for fuller discussion, see Macalister, 1999: 41), such an explanation cannot apply to the differences between the two *School Journals* corpora.

Language use in the *School Journals* suggests a tendency to make Maori the subject of study in the 1960s. Maori are more strongly represented in informative than in imaginative prose passages. It would appear, therefore, that the writers of the 1960s were more interested than those of the 1990s in emphasising difference between Maori and Pakeha. This impression is strengthened by an examination of the word type *pakeha*, which could be considered as either the complement or the opposite of *Maori*. While it occurred only 3 times in the 1990s corpus, in the 1960s corpus *pakeha* was a sizeable presence, accounting for 68 tokens. The use of *pakeha* made explicit what *Maori* was different from, or being compared with, or in opposition to. However, the difference/comparison/opposition was more usually implicit, as seen in the titles of informative prose passages such as 'The Maori as a Plant Hunter', 'Maori Food' and 'Maori Hand Games'.

A second possible reason for the difference in frequency of *Maori* in the two *School Journals* corpora is that, in imaginative prose passages, the 1990s corpus allows the context, which here is taken to include the illustrations, to define ethnicity. Thus, the collocation of *Maori* in descriptive phrases such as:

- a Maori boy
- a young Maori woman
- the old Maori man with the tattooed face
- a large Maori had appeared in the doorway

is not found in the 1990s corpus. If there are such characters, the context makes it clear that they are Maori. In other words, *Maori* as a type of shorthand for difference has become virtually obsolete in the *Journals* of the 1990s.²

2. The Portrayal of the Maori and of Maoridom

The use of the Maori language, or words of Maori origin in New Zealand English, inevitably indicates attitudes to Maori and Maoridom. The changing patterns of language use mentioned above would appear to signal changing attitudes.

2.1 The Portrayal of Maori People

Maori are more likely to be found as named characters in the 1990s. When they are present in the 1960s, they are often historical characters, as earlier

² The collocations of *Maori* in the 1990s corpus are shown in the appendix.

analysis of personal names suggested (Macalister, 1999: 45-46). They are much less likely to be found as the actors in imaginative prose.

Further, although this should not be over-emphasised, in the 1960s corpus there was a tendency to stereotyping along the following lines.

a proud Maori chief
two fine looking Maoris
the sullen Maori

This could be regarded as a tendency to ascribe positive characteristics to physical appearance and bearing, and negative characteristics to character. Certainly, similar collocational evidence of stereotyping does not exist in the 1990s corpus, despite Caddick's claim that 'there is little ... to suggest that Maori representation is moving beyond stereotypical gender representation' (1992: 13) in the *Journals* of the late 1980s.

In short, then, it could be proposed that Maori have moved from relative invisibility to relative visibility, and from one-dimensionality to a more rounded presentation. This change could well be associated with urbanisation. Michael King (1997) points out that the events of the 1970s and 1980s that signalled the Maori revival were a result of urbanisation. At the end of the Second World War, 75% of the Maori population lived in rural areas, where there were relatively few Pakeha. A generation later, by the mid-1970s, 75% of the Maori population was urban-dwelling (Dunstall, 1981: 403). In terms of population movement, then, the 1960s were part of the transition from rural to urban; a generation later and the picture is of stability rather than change.

2.2 The Portrayal of Maoridom

In the 1960s corpus, Maori words were more likely to be found in informative prose passages than is the case in the 1990s. Maoridom, therefore, was more likely to be the subject of study. The study included both history and the material culture of the Maori. This difference between the two corpora may be explained in part by the *Journals* of the 1960s being more obviously curriculum-driven. It should not be forgotten, however, that a curriculum is a reflection of prevailing attitudes.

The language of the *Journals*, such as the repeated appearance of the collocation *whare raupo*, suggests that the Maori world was viewed in the 1960s as a rural one. There was a focus on hunter-gatherer activities, and on cultivation, as suggested by the sub-category of botanical words.

It is also interesting that the number of Flora and Fauna types present in the 1960s corpus (56) is significantly larger than the number present in the 1990s corpus (27). This is not necessarily a result of the 1960s corpus being larger than the 1990s corpus. The main difference is in botanical terms. The 1960s corpus contains 38 different types for trees & plants, as opposed to a modest 7 in the 1990s. The most frequent botanical types in both corpora are ranked according to frequency in Table 1.

Table 1: Types for trees & plants ranked by frequency (no. of tokens)

1960s Corpus	1990s Corpus
taro (33)	kumara (22)
kiekie (20)	kowhai (3)
raupo (16)	puha (2)
kumara (15)	—
kouka (15)	—
manuka (10)	—

The following observations, some of them intuitive, can be made about the information in this table:

- only three of the six most frequent types in the 1960s corpus (*taro*, *kumara*, *manuka*) are likely to have common currency in the 1990s
- of those three, *taro*, the most frequent type in the 1960s corpus, is, in the 1990s, associated with Pacific Island languages and cultures rather than with Maori. Its sole occurrence in the 1990s corpus is in a Niuean context.
- in this sub-category of the corpora, types referring to food crops are frequent
- the usual collocation of *raupo*, the third most frequent type in the 1960s corpus, is *whare raupo*

In making these observations, it must be remembered that the *Journals* of the 1960s were published during the urbanisation process that lead to the Maori revival. The *Journals* do not necessarily, therefore, present a deliberately misleading portrayal of Maoridom, although the use of language in the *Journals* does suggest that writers and editors had yet to come to terms with this population shift.

However, there has certainly been a trend away from the depiction of a rural present rooted in traditional activities and an historical past to an emphasis on the contemporary and urban. In addition, there is lexical evidence of a greater sensitivity to Maoridom. Once again, language and social changes appear to be closely linked.

3. An Authentic Voice?: The Attitude to Use of Maori

In the 1960s corpus, the use of Maori to add 'colour' was not uncommon, as these three examples make clear:

Rupene is a Maori boy, who lives with his mother and father in a house by a creek.³

When the *hangi* is opened mother puts his *kai* on a *rourou*⁴

³ 'Rupene', by Ruth Park, in Part 1, Number 2, 1967: 29 – 33. This story was first published in 1951, but the decision to republish it in 1967 strongly suggests that its language and attitudes were still regarded as current.

⁴ 'Rere's Home in the Pa', by Margaret Wilson, in Part 1, Number 4, 1967: 23

And I bet if we were to look closely, we'd find *kumi kumi*, *puha*, *taro*, or *kumara* ...⁵

In the first example, apart from the identification *Maori*, there is nothing in the passage, nor, in fact, the illustrations, to prevent *Rupene* being replaced by *Rupert*. This story, about a Maori child with a pet lamb called Curly, could as easily be about a European child in any generalised European setting.

In the second example, the unavoidable feeling is that *kai* and *rourou* have simply been substituted for *food* and *plate*. Indeed, the blandness of the sentence suggests that it was only composed so that such a substitution could be carried out.

In the third example, which is an imaginative prose passage about Pakeha characters with Pakeha names, the use of Maori feels gratuitous. It is unlikely and inauthentic language use, and, as with the first example, serves only to establish a New Zealand setting for a story that could be interchangeable with any European tale.

The use of personal names to add Maori and/or multicultural 'colour' to a passage is not restricted to the 1960s corpus⁶, although in the 1990s *Journals* illustrations do at least support the names. In the other lexical categories, however, the impression from the 1990s corpus is that words of Maori origin are used in a naturally occurring and authentic manner.⁷

There is, however, a suspicion that the use of words in the Tikanga Maori/General category has become restricted to Maori writing about Maori. The sole exception, although an interesting one, shown by collocation work was:

The real gannets hongī with two of the concrete gannets⁸

This is interesting not only because of its application to the natural world, but because it is the only example in the corpora of a Maori word on the verge of a verb form morphological change that would demonstrate 'that the 'foreign' element has become an integral part of its new system' (Hartley, 1982: 112).

4. The Future Development of the New Zealand Lexicon

It is a truism that we learn from the past. Through this analysis of the two *School Journals* corpora, therefore, can a future trend be discerned?

In the earlier article I raised the suggestion (Macalister, 1999: 48) that the rate of change in the New Zealand lexicon since the late 1960s has been more marked and more rapid than the rate during the preceding three or four

⁵ 'Old Man's Island', by Barry Mitcalfe, in Part 4, Number 3, 1967: 2-14

⁶ See, for example, the use of the names *Rawiri*, *Awhina*, *Sailau* and *Amit* in 'Hero' by Alan Bagnall, Part 4, Number 2, 1998

⁷ Editors for Maori language publications at Learning Media are consulted to ensure that this is the case (personal communication)

⁸ Part 2, Number 3, 1998: 15

generations combined. This acceleration of change is the result of changes in society, particularly since 1981. Whether the current rate of lexical change will be maintained is unknown, but one example from the 1990s corpus is of particular interest and may hint at future developments.

Heads are bowed for a lotu (karakia)⁹

Here the Maori word is used as an embedded gloss in an English language context to explain the meaning of a Samoan word, so that a word of Maori origin acts as the bridge from a foreign language to English.

5. Conclusion

The principal differences in the use of Maori words in New Zealand English between the 1960s and the 1990s, as displayed by the corpora used in this study, are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Key Differences Between the 1960s and the 1990s Corpora

1960s Corpus	1990s Corpus
words of Maori origin predominantly found in informative prose	words of Maori origin more likely to be found in imaginative prose
Maori people and culture marked as different	little marking for difference
Maori presented as historical characters	Maori presented as 'ordinary people'
Maori portrayed as inhabiting a traditional, rural world	Maori portrayed as inhabiting a contemporary, urban world
words of Maori origin used to add 'colour'	authentic use of Maori words
non-Maori writing about Maori	Maori writing about Maori

There have, therefore, been significant changes in the use of words of Maori origin in the New Zealand English lexicon over a thirty-year period. These changes parallel changes within New Zealand society, and remind us that language use is a sensitive barometer of social and cultural development.

Appendix

The collocation of *Maori* in the 1990s corpus, classified by use.

- describing an object
 - a short Maori flute
 - a traditional Maori flute
 - Maori waka

⁹ Part 4, Number 1, 1998: 6

in the Maori hall

2. describing people
treasured by Maori as a material to be used
cloaked, tattooed Maori
Ngati Poneke Young Maori Club
3. describing a person
Hey, short, curly haired, skinny Maori friend¹⁰
4. referring to the language
our Maori class
our own Maori class
the name ... means ... in Maori

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¹⁰ The use here is intended to be humorous and is complemented by 'Sure, lanky, blond, straight-haired Pakeha'.