Revisiting Weka and Waiata: Familiarity with Maori words among older speakers of New Zealand English

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1. Introduction

There is a considerable body of work that suggests that the presence of Maori words in New Zealand English has been growing since the 1970s. Some of this work is based on observation and impression (Deverson, 1984, 1991) whereas other evidence comes from empirical studies (Macalister 2006a). The main conclusions are that not only is the total number of Maori words (or tokens) being used increasing, but so is the number of different words (or types). In other words, the increase in the Maori word presence cannot be explained by a small number of words being used more often, but by growth in the Maori word lexicon of New Zealand English speakers. Furthermore, this growth appears to be driven by words relating to social culture, defined as words relating to the invisible and intangible expressions of a culture such as social roles, relationships and concepts.

While the evidence suggests an increasing Maori word presence in New Zealand English, the fact of their being present in written texts does not necessarily mean that the words are understood by readers. It could be, for example, that their presence reflects a certain 'political correctness' and that often the words are supported by glosses, or that they are used inter-changeably with English language synonyms. To investigate this question of the extent to which the Maori words found in use were familiar, a survey was

carried out with senior secondary school students in the greater Wellington region in 2002. The survey design, implementation and results have been described elsewhere (Macalister 2004; Macalister 2006b) and will not be repeated here, except to say that one finding was that previous estimates of an average New Zealand English speaker's Maori word vocabulary (other than proper names) at 40 - 50 words (Gordon & Deverson, 1998) have been too conservative and should be revised upwards, to the 80 – 90 word range. On the basis of the survey findings in 2002, it was also suggested that:

> [The students'] loanword lexicon is likely to increase with age, and with increased exposure to loanword use. One could argue, therefore, that the survey presents a snapshot of the loanword vocabulary with which school leavers enter adult life.

An alternative view, however, is that, with the increase of words from the social culture category in recent years, the students may be being exposed to a greater number of such words than, say, the average 60-year-old whose vocabulary may be more fossilised than the average late-teen's. Thus, when an opportunity to administer the survey to a significantly older sector of the population presented itself in 2006, the opportunity was taken. This paper reports on the results of that survey.

2. The Respondent Population

The respondents were all attendees at the first of two University of the Third Age (U3A) lectures delivered by the author, and the survey questionnaires were filled in on the spot. The questionnaire began with some simple biographical questions, which were kept the same as for the administration to students. Thought was given to adding questions about age, education and socio-economic factors, but it was felt such questions may have been regarded

as too intrusive and therefore have discouraged responses. Sixty-eight valid questionnaires were received and the respondent population's characteristics can be seen in Table 1, along with a comparison to the school population.

Table 1: Comparison of the two respondent populations

	U3A	**Secondary schools**
% female	79.4	70.8
% Pakeha	94.1	56.1
% New Zealand-born	73.5	78.2
% te reo speakers	1.5	6.1
% studied te reo	2.9	31.6

As none of the U3A respondents identified as Maori or Pacific Island Nation, it was decided to compare their results with Pakeha school respondents only, as ethnic identification was found in 2002 to be clearly related to familiarity with Maori words. A comparison of the two populations that are used in this article is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of U3A and Pakeha student populations

	U3A	**Pakeha x secondary schools**
% female	79.4	69.3
% New Zealand-born	73.5	93.1
% te reo speakers	1.5	4.9
% studied te reo	2.9	23.8

One interesting difference between the two populations is that non-New Zealand-born adults were much more likely to identify as Pakeha than the younger respondents, where non-New Zealand-born respondents were more likely to select 'Other' for ethnic identity. Another interesting difference is that younger respondents are much more likely to have studied te reo, with the possible expectation that this would have an effect on their familiarity

with Maori words. However the key difference between the two populations in one of age, with the U3A respondents estimated to be 65 years and older, as they are overwhelmingly retired from paid employment.

3. Results

The questionnaire consisted of 50-items drawn from the categories of flora and fauna, material culture, and social culture. The results are discussed in terms of the percentage of respondents who correctly answered an item, and the following interpretation is placed on those results.

Table 3: Interpretation of Results

Degree of familiarity	**Description**
80-100%	likely to be familiar to most speakers of New Zealand English
60-79%	likely to be familiar to a majority of speakers of New Zealand English
40-59%	likely to be familiar to around half the speakers of New Zealand English, and to become better known
20-39%	likely to be familiar to a minority of speakers of New Zealand English
0-19%	likely to be known to a relatively few speakers of New Zealand English, and generally to be regarded as an unknown word

3.1 Flora and Fauna

The results for the fourteen items in the flora and fauna category are shown in Table 4. For the students, this was the category with the greatest proportion of poorly known words. The U3A respondents showed much greater familiarity with the words in this category, however, and only one word (*tieke*) was

largely unfamiliar. This may reflect the fact that it refers to an endangered bird found only on a few off-shore island sanctuaries, and as such is unlikely to be encountered.

Table 4: Flora and Fauna

	U3A	**Pakeha x secondary schools**
pohutukawa	100	97.4
pipi		94.4
kea		92.1
weta		92.9
pukeko	97	89.2
hoki		77.5
kina	95.6	78.3
kowhai		84.9
toetoe	92.6	64.6
raupo	85.3	36.2
akeake	77.9	7.9
kotuku	76.5	26.5
piwakawaka	61.8	8.7
tieke	11.8	7.7

When comparing results for the two populations, there were no surprises with the first eight words in the table; in terms of the interpretation proposed earlier the U3A results confirm that all are likely to be familiar to most or a majority of speakers of New Zealand English. There is probably no surprise with *toetoe* either, as the failure to recognise this word among school students may have been orthographic – *toitoi* may have been more familiar. The most striking feature of Table 4 is that the four words judged as being familiar to a minority of or relatively few New Zealand English speakers are now appearing as familiar. The reasons for this are necessarily speculative. It may be that *raupo* is more familiar to older speakers of New Zealand English

through historical uses such as *whare raupo* and *raupo hut*[1]; *akeake* may be more familiar because of exposure to the term through gardening.

3.2 Material Culture

The results for the eleven items in the material culture category are shown in Table 5. Five of the items achieved very high familiarity scores with the U3A population, and four of these items scored well with Pakeha students as well; the exception was *pa*. There is a suggestion that some of the less familiar words (*whare kai, koru, taiaha*) are becoming more familiar, but perhaps the most interesting difference is with *nohoanga*. This is not a word that would be expected to move into common use in New Zealand English, although it is likely to continue to survive in official documents. The fact that Pakeha secondary students have a much higher familiarity score for this word may be related to the use of Maori language instructions in at least some schools, such as *e noho*, and the ability to guess on the basis of identifiable word parts. This interpretation is supported by a comment made by one participant during the initial trialling of the questionnaire, who said that she had been able to guess *nohoanga* because she knew *e noho*.

3.3 Social Culture

The largest category of words, reflecting their presence in the corpus itself, was social culture. Results for the twenty-five items in this category are shown in Table 6. The immediate impression is, again, that the U3A

[1] In a study of the New Zealand *School Journal* published in the 1960s, *raupo* was the third most common flora and fauna type, with 16 tokens, and *whare raupo* the most common collocation ((Macalister, 2000)

Table 5: Material Culture Results

	U3A	**Pakeha x secondary schools**
pa	100	69.6
poi		88.6
waka		90.7
hangi		80.2
pounamu	97	75.0
whare kai	79.4	59.3
koru	70.6	56.3
taiaha	66.2	46.6
maunga	51.5	59.0
paepae	14.7	15.9
nohoanga	1.5	21.2

Table 6: Social Culture Results

	U3A	**Pakeha x secondary schools**
haka	100	97.4
hikoi		31.0
te reo	98.5	85.2
utu	97	41.0
tapu	95.6	82.8
kaumatua	94.1	54.0
aroha		84.9
hui	92.6	77.2
mokopuna		52.6
whakapapa	89.7	59.5
karakia	83.8	47.1
taonga	80.9	60.6
rangatiratanga	72	21.2
hapu	70.6	40.7
taha Maori	66.2	31.5
mihi	61.8	58.2
korero	60.3	53.4
kura kaupapa	57.3	35.4
mana whenua	42.6	49.2
taihoa	41.2	37
wairua		38.6
kaitiaki	33.8	28.6
rahui	29.4	11.4
raupatu	20.6	29.6
tumuaki	4.4	36.5

respondents display greater familiarity with these Maori words than do the Pakeha students, but there is some variability in this picture.

There is one group of words (*raupatu, kaitiaki, wairua, taihoa, mana whenua, korero, mihi*) where similar or higher familiarity scores by the students would suggest that those words are likely to move into the New Zealand English lexicon; the younger respondents are at the start of their linguistic development, relatively speaking, and greater exposure to these words over time is likely to make them more familiar. This would also support the claim that this category is the likely area of increase in Maori word vocabulary of New Zealand English speakers.

In a second group of words where the U3A respondents have higher familiarity scores than the Pakeha students (*hikoi, utu, rangatiratanga*) the difference may be explained by greater access to, and consumption of, news media, and in particular political news. In the following two amusing examples of words adapted from *hikoi,* the humour relies upon the audience recognising the underlying Maori form and meaning in the nonce creation, a hybrid incorporating an English language element.

> It has been a few years since cockies marched on Parliament about things like this. Perhaps now they'll grab themselves a bunch of vicars and hold a Cock-oi.
>
> Listener, 17 October 1998

> I know what a $1,000 fine means to one of my whānau, who on the car-koi down to Parliament got fined 1,000 bucks for supposedly "driving in a manner likely to annoy other people" …
>
> Hansard, April 6 2006

A final comment on the items in Table 6 is that *tumuaki* is the clearest indicator of the influence of the use of te reo Maori in today's schools; *tumuaki* and *head teacher/principal* are often to be found together on that person's door.

4. Discussion

The results of this administration of the questionnaire to a group of older speakers of New Zealand English suggest two reasons to expect increasing familiarity with words of Maori origin. First, for a number of words in all three categories the older speakers show greater familiarity than the Pakeha students; this suggests that increasing familiarity is likely to come with age, through exposure to language in the media and elsewhere and through broadening life experience. The second reason is that, for a limited number of words, the student respondents already show greater familiarity than the U3A respondents; these words are mainly found in the social culture category and, for the reasons mentioned above, are likely to become more familiar over time.

As a result, not only are the students likely to increase their Maori word vocabulary over time, but by the time those students surveyed in 2002 become eligible for U3A membership, they are likely to have larger Maori word vocabularies than the current U3A members. If students in 2002 can be estimated to have a Maori word vocabulary (other than proper names) of 80 to 90 words then the U3A respondents, applying the same arithmetical formula, can be estimated to have a Maori word vocabulary of around 130[2].

[2] This figure is based on multiplying the percentage of types in the two highest bands by 178, which was the number of types in the database form which the 50 items were drawn, thus 76% x 178 = 135.28.

The principal caveat that should be attached to the results reported on in this paper is that the respondents, through their participation in U3A, indicate an on-going interest in learning. It is an open question, therefore, as to how representative they are of the over-65 age group.

5. Future Directions

As the title of this paper suggests, this investigation of the familiarity of speakers of New Zealand English with Maori words is part of an on-going study. Further implementations of the survey are planned. It is hoped that, during 2007, the questionnaire will be administered again in schools in the greater Wellington region, to determine whether increasing familiarity with Maori words is observable in the next school generation, and also in schools in other regions, to investigate the possibility of regional variation in familiarity with Maori words.

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