



Corinne Seals

Senior lecturer in applied linguistics at Victoria University of Wellington

With the recent increase in te reo Māori in English-dominant mainstream broadcasting, there has also been a not unexpected reaction from people uncomfortable with this.

Often this response comes from monolingual speakers from the linguistic majority (eg, speakers of only English in New Zealand) and involves wanting only one language to be present at a time (ie, only English in mainstream broadcasting).

This response is based on a problematic assumption – that there is too much “interference” from another language (in this case te reo Māori), which they argue makes communication difficult.

However, this perspective claims a monolingual privilege, ignoring what the experience is for bilinguals and multilinguals who encounter multiple languages in mainstream programming.

Notably, nearly one-fifth of New Zealand’s population can speak more than one language, according to the 2013 census. While some monolingual English speakers may feel put out by the increased presence of additional languages in mainstream broadcasting,



Separation anxiety

Language Matters

linguistic inclusiveness in mainstream spaces is important and normal for bilingual and multilingual speakers in New Zealand.

As explained by Māori Language Commissioner Professor Rawinia Higgins, speakers and learners of te reo Māori have worked hard for the right to have te reo present in public spaces in Aotearoa NZ.

The regular visible and audible presence of te reo has been an important contributing factor to normalising the use of te reo and removing stigma associated with the language, therein also supporting the linguistic identity of te reo speakers and those for whom te reo is a

language of family heritage.

Let’s also address how easy or not it is to understand the increasing presence of te reo Māori in mainstream New Zealand broadcasting. As illustrated by Dr Awanui Te Huia in her recent response, the fluid movement between languages is a completely normal approach to communication for bilingual and multilingual speakers.

Indeed, it is not the norm among bilingual and multilingual speakers or within bilingual and multilingual societies to keep languages completely separate from each other. Instead, the norm is to draw fluidly upon all of the languages we have access to in order to communicate meaning – a process called “translanguaging”.

As people of any linguistic background

utilise and are exposed to translanguaging more often in communication, their ability to make meaning across a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts strengthens. Translanguaging can occur within sentences, across sentences, and even between speakers.

Importantly, the growing body of translanguaging research has shown that people do not need to know a language well to still understand the overall meaning when translanguaging is used.

That’s in part because, like all real-life communication between people, translanguaging occurs within a given context. Speakers and listeners draw upon the context to make sense of what is being said – whether in one language or multiple languages.

For example, if someone asks, “Did he do it?”, the listener will use the conversational context as well as the context of recent events to interpret who “he” refers to and what “it” might be.

Likewise, when a teacher in Translanguaging Aotearoa’s research says, “It’s Sami’s time to speak so me wahangū tātou”, even outside listeners will use the context of the classroom and teaching children to understand that “me wahangū tātou” means that they need to be quiet and listen.

The inclusion of more te reo in regular broadcasting is not a hindrance to communication, nor is the use of multiple languages in one space. On the contrary, there are many more benefits than not that regular inclusion of te reo and translanguaging brings.

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Colombia’s chance for a change

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

The victory of Gustavo Petro, a former leftwing guerrilla fighter, in Colombia’s presidential election is a watershed moment in Latin America. Petro will be the first leftwinger to lead the country. He won because voters, especially in Colombia’s biggest cities, were tired of the corruption, poverty and violence that have plagued the country.

Petro campaigned to expand social programmes, tax the rich and move away from an economy dependent on fossil fuels.

He is right to aim for a more peaceful and less unequal country. By rebuilding agriculture and industry, he aims to weaken Colombia’s criminal

Viewpoint

organisations and their political power. This programme will not be easy to deliver as Petro’s coalition has the support of only a quarter of lawmakers. But his policy to implement the 2016 peace deal with the Farc guerillas that the last government abandoned has already yielded results – rebel groups still active responded positively to his call for talks.

Petro’s roots are not in the feminist, indigenous and anti-racist movements that rose in the last decade. It was his running mate – Francia Marquez, an Afro-Colombian woman – who joined the protests, appealing to the young with whom she marched. The region’s third most populous nation will now have its first black vice-president.