Attitudes of non-Māori New Zealanders towards the use of Māori in New Zealand English

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Abstract

As majority language speakers have an important impact on minority languages, the attitudes and behaviours of non-Māori New Zealanders towards the Māori language are likely to have an influence on Māori language regeneration (de Bres 2008). Moreover, as the presence of Māori words is arguably the most distinctive feature of New Zealand English (Deverson 1991, Macalister 2005), these attitudes and behaviours are also likely to influence aspects of New Zealand English. Although there is now considerable research on attitudes towards the Māori language in New Zealand, there has been less research on attitudes towards the use of Māori in the context of New Zealand English in particular. This article reports on the results of research on the attitudes and behaviours of non-Māori New Zealanders towards the Māori language, focusing on two behaviours specifically relating to the use of Māori in New Zealand English, namely the use of Māori words and phrases and the pronunciation of Māori words. The results are considered from the dual perspective of what they tell us about the attitudes of non-Māori towards the Māori language in a context of language regeneration, and what they might imply for the future development of New Zealand English.

1. The use of Māori in New Zealand English and attitudes towards the Māori language

Previous research has consistently shown that the attitudes of Māori towards the Māori language are considerably more positive than those of non-Māori (see Boyce 2005 for a review). In behavioural terms, the more positive attitudes of Māori towards the Māori language are arguably most strongly reflected in the dramatically higher proportion of Māori compared to non-Māori who can speak the Māori language, but a similar pattern is also apparent in relation to Māori words used within New Zealand English. The use of Māori lexical items in New Zealand English is the subject of a body of research, progressing from small studies based on impression and observation (Deverson 1991, Trudgill and Hannah 1982, Bellett 1995) to large-scale corpus-based research (Kennedy and Yamazaki 1999, Macalister 2003). This research has found that words of Māori origin account for approximately 5-6

per 1,000 words of spoken and written New Zealand English (Kennedy and Yamazaki 1999), but that Māori tend to both know and use a higher number of Māori words in English than non-Māori (Bellett 1995, Kennedy 2001, Macalister 2003). Kennedy (2001: 75) also found that 'Pākehā speakers […] use a much higher proportion of Māori words that are proper nouns', whereas 'Māori speakers not only used more Māori overall, but they have a wider Māori vocabulary, which they use when speaking English.'

Using some categories of Māori words is not a matter of choice for non-Māori. This is the case for many proper nouns, e.g. names of places and people (*Whakatāne*, *Rawiri Paratene*), and various flora and fauna (*kōwhai*, *kakapō*), which may only have a Māori name. For other categories, however, using a Māori word involves a specific choice. This is the case, for example, when a speaker chooses to use the greeting *kia ora* instead of *hello*, or the social culture terms *whānau* instead of *family* or *hui* instead of *meeting*. Macalister (2007a: 500-503) discusses six possible motivations for choosing a Māori word over an English word when two variants exist. These include economy of expression (e.g. *pā* instead of *fortified village*), expression of identity (ethnic identity for Māori or national identity for non-Māori), displaying empathy with Māoridom (e.g. *Aotearoa* instead of *New Zealand*), making an impact (political or humorous, as in *Pā Wars*), (Māori) cultural reference (e.g. *kaumātua* rather than *elder*) and clarity of meaning (e.g. *Ngāti* to convey the sense of 'a community of interest', as in *Ngāti Cappuccino*). Macalister notes that 'the operation of at least some of these factors affecting lexical choice is clearly going to be influenced by social and political changes' and that 'the emphasis on biculturalism and the recognition of *te reo Māori* as an official language, for example, must have an influence on the lexical choices individuals make'. Importantly, he also observes that 'in that regard, it is worth noting that choosing not to use a Māori word when one exists also illustrates the factors at work'.

Many of the motivations suggested above for using Māori words in English relate in part to attitudes towards the Māori language, and a potential link between attitudes towards the Māori language and the use of Māori words in English has been suggested in some previous studies. In her analysis of Māori lexical items in the newsletters of kōhanga reo, King (1995: 56) suggests that using Māori words and phrases in English 'enables the speaker/writer to occupy a linguistic space removed from standard [New Zealand English] and closer to that of Māori', and, in a context where many Māori are not fluent in Māori, may also function to express positive attitudes towards Māori language regeneration. Similarly, Kennedy (2001: 77) suggests that Māori speakers' more frequent use of Māori words in his findings might function as 'a way of deliberately marking identity, of resisting further assimilation [and] of supporting language revival'. Given these observations in relation to Māori, one plausible hypothesis is that those non-Māori who have positive attitudes towards the Māori language will also show a preference for using

Māori words in English, as a means of expressing these attitudes. Such a relationship is indeed suggested in research by Thompson (1990), who found that Pākehā participants with positive attitudes towards the Māori language were more likely to select Māori words over English words in a cloze exercise.

Attitudes towards the Māori language may bear a relationship not only to the choice to use Māori words but also to how to pronounce them. The presence of Māori words in New Zealand English means that pronouncing Māori words is virtually unavoidable for speakers of this variety. Unlike the decision to use a Māori word or not, here speakers are forced to choose whether to pronounce a Māori word using anglicised pronunciation or based on how it would sound if used in the context of the Māori language. Previous research has indicated a trend (among Māori at least) that 'the more integrated someone is into the Māori community, the greater the likelihood that they will use Māori pronunciation for words of Māori origin when speaking [English]' (Boyce 1992: 138). Perhaps even more than the choice of Māori lexical items, pronunciation of Māori words has become a salient social marker in New Zealand, as the following quote from a magazine columnist (cited in Macalister 2005) succinctly reflects:

> How a Pakeha chooses to pronounce 'Māori' determines precisely where they fit on the PC scale. There are 11 possible variations, from 'may-o-ree' at one end to Kim Hill[1]'s 'mow-rri' at the other. The key is how broad you make your 'a' and whether you roll your 'r'. Such small things, but they can make the difference between being taken for a Neanderthal bozo and getting on a polytech payroll.

Despite the high salience of both the use and pronunciation of Māori words in New Zealand English, little research has specifically investigated attitudes towards these behaviours among either Māori or non-Māori. This article discusses the attitudes of a group of non-Māori New Zealanders towards both of these behaviours, with the aim of better understanding the attitudinal basis for speakers' behavioural choices and how these might relate to both prospects for Māori language regeneration and the development of New Zealand English.

2. Methodology

In 2007 I collected questionnaire and interview data from eighty non-Māori New Zealanders at nine white collar workplaces in Wellington, to investigate their

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[1] Kim Hill is a prominent presenter on New Zealand's National Radio.

attitudes and behaviours towards the Māori language (see de Bres 2008). Attitude statements in the questionnaire were used to place participants into three attitude categories: 'Supporters' (56.3%, who had positive attitudes towards the Māori language), 'Uninterested' (38.8%, who were largely uninterested in the Māori language), and 'English Only' (5%, who had negative attitudes towards the Māori language)[2]. These results reflect previous research on attitudes of non Māori towards the Māori language (e.g. TPK 2006) in that they showed evidence of negative attitudes towards the Māori language among some participants, but also indicated a group of participants with considerably more positive attitudes towards the Māori language. This provides an important reminder that, when talking of the attitudes of non-Māori in relation to the Māori language, we should have a diverse group of people in mind.

The participants were asked in the questionnaire which behaviours they thought Māori and non-Māori New Zealanders could engage in to support the Māori language, but the questionnaire format did not allow for enquiring into their attitudes towards these behaviours in depth. Semi-structured interviews with a randomly selected subset of twenty-six participants, including some from each attitude category, provided an opportunity for more detailed discussion of a selection of these behaviours. The subset comprised eleven Supporters, eleven Uninterested participants, and four English Only participants, the latter representing all available participants from this category. The general format was for participants to be asked whether they engaged in the relevant behaviour themselves, leading on to a discussion of their attitudes towards the behaviour more generally. The data relating to the participants' own behaviours are based on self-reports, and therefore cannot be seen as a straightforward reflection of the participants' actual behaviours[3]. This was not considered a problem in this context, as the main purpose was to elicit participants' attitudes towards these behaviours. Just two of the behaviours are discussed here, those specifically relating to the use of Māori in New Zealand English.

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[2] These categories were based on those developed by Te Puni Kōkiri (2002)

[3] To avoid repetition, however, the phrasing 'the participant stated that they…' is not used each time a participant's reported engagement in a behaviour is discussed.

3.   Using Māori words and phrases

One behaviour discussed with the participants was knowing and using some basic Māori words and phrases[4].   The participants were asked if they had a basic knowledge of some Māori words and phrases, and if they used these in their everyday life. Most participants claimed to have a 'very basic' knowledge of Māori words and phrases, with Uninterested and English Only participants in particular emphasising the limited extent of their knowledge (God…very basic (M-U-30/35-PrI[5]), Very very very basic (F-U-20/25-PbG))[6].   A majority of Supporters and a minority of Uninterested participants also reported using Māori words and phrases in their daily life. A number of Supporters reported doing so very frequently (I do. *All* the time (F-S-25/30-PrI), Yeah I do, *daily*, yep…yep […] in every, every context (M-S-25/30-PbM)), but it was much more common for participants to report rarely using the phrases they knew. Participants were more likely to use Māori words than phrases, and often gave examples of established borrowings in New Zealand English, such as *kai*, *whānau* and *puku*. Similarly, those who reported using phrases generally gave examples of set greetings and phrases such as *kia ora*, *kei te pēhea koe*, *ka kite anō* and *ka pai*.

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[4] Defining what counts as a 'Māori word' is not a straightforward matter (see Macalister 2003). For current purposes, it was assumed that participants would view a Māori 'word' as a one-word-length lexical item of Māori origin (e.g. *kai*) and a Māori 'phrase' as the use of more than one such lexical item consecutively (e.g. *kia ora*).

[5] I use a notation system throughout the article to summarise the characteristics of quoted participants. Gender is indicated by M or F; attitude category by S, U or EO; age by tranche; workplace by PbM (a public sector organisation whose work relates specifically to Māori issues), PbG (a general public sector organisation), PrNZ (a private sector organisation based wholly in New Zealand) or PrI (an international private sector organisation with a base in New Zealand); all are linked by hyphens. For example F-U-25/30-PbG indicates the participant is a female Uninterested participant aged 25 to 30 working in a general public sector organisation. Some identifying information (e.g. place names or other details) have been altered to preserve confidentiality.

[6] Supporters' generally greater knowledge of Māori words was evident in their occasional use of them in other parts of the interview, although often glossed in English, e.g.:

> The kaupapa is that the idea is to give back, that you share what you are doing in your home or your workplace (F-S-30/35-PbG)

> They actively participate in Māoritanga you know their Māoriness
> (M-S-25/30-PbM)

> He's got a taiaha, this massive spear thing which he was gifted
> (F-S-25/30-PrI)

Those participants who chose to use Māori words or phrases in English gave a range of reasons for doing so, including familiarity due to having previously learnt Māori, creating affiliation with Māori, and expressing national identity[7]:

> There are some words that are just very expressive and would pop out even if I was talking with someone who doesn't speak [Māori] at all (F-S-30/35-PbM)

> I have a lot of um (*laughs*) this is going to sound like 'some of my best friends are Māori' (*interviewer laughs*) but I do, of my circle of friends a lot of them are Māori and a lot of them are proud of being Māori […] so I think it makes them comfortable to use basic sayings (M-S-25/30-PbM)

> One aspect that I really like about it is […] this is the only place you can do it, it makes us different and it makes this country quite cool (M-S-25/30-PbM)

Participants who instead reported infrequent use of Māori words and phrases gave a number of reasons for this. Participants often said using Māori words and phrases did not come naturally to them:

> I wouldn't use kia ora as a standard greeting because that's not me […] I sort of thought about it at one time but I thought it's not me, that's not who I am (F-U-30/35-PbG)

Whereas this sense of artificiality was reason enough for many participants to not use Māori words and phrases, others had much more ambivalent attitudes. Supporters in particular tended to claim generally positive attitudes towards the use of Māori words and phrases, but also to express self-consciousness about actually using them, often relating to fears as to how others would react:

> I try, I'm still really shy about it. It's certainly not something that…I mean saying kia ora is definitely something that comes pretty naturally now…but the rest is sort of quite conscious, and I still feel quite sort of awkward and embarrassed about it (F-S-30/35-PbG)

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[7] The second two of these relate to two of the motivations for Māori word use identified by Macalister (2007a): *expressing identity* and *displaying empathy with Māoridom*. One further motivation Macalister identifies, *making an impact*, was also evident in a reported practice among a minority of participants of using Māori words and phrases for humorous effect (see de Bres 2008 for further discussion of this practice):

> We have a sort of joke at home […] when we ring each other we usually just say 'kia ora, kei te pēhea koe?' but it's a little bit tongue-in-cheek (F-S-25/30-PbG)

I guess I am a bit shy of being seen as a liberal Pākehā that's just trying to show off and be politically correct and that sort of thing (F-S-30/35-PbG)

Sometimes I feel…funny greeting Māori people in their language […] like they're going to think oh she's such a try-hard you know (F-U-25/30-PrI)

I used to years ago with [workplace] because you know being a government department […it was] a fairly kind of liberal place, it was a fairly diverse work environment so I used to answer the phone and say kia ora and had it on my voicemail message but then when I moved out of that environment…I sort of left that behind really…and I think if I did it now, if I actually answered the phone and said kia ora, I think people might react quite differently (*laughs*) (M-S-30/35-PrI)

Some participants felt using Māori words and phrases would come more naturally to them with effort and practice:

There's always that step between when you do something and it comes naturally and when you're actually forcing it and sometimes […] it comes naturally after you've spent some time making yourself do things
(F-S-30/35-PbG)

Others, however, were waiting for changes in the attitudes and behaviours of others to occur first:

I think that would change […] if the whole country's attitude towards it changed…I think […] if something becomes widely used or accepted then […] people will use it more and more and not feel…(F-U-30/35-PrNZ)

The participants' responses to this behaviour highlight the quite conscious choice that appears to be involved for many non-Māori in using Māori words and phrases in English, as well as the high sensitivity of the participants to their social environment when it comes to Māori language use. Using Māori words and phrases did not come naturally to most participants and, while several had positive attitudes towards engaging in this behaviour, the sense of artificiality or discomfort they experienced in actually doing so could easily derail their intentions. A relevant concept here may be Rampton's (1995, 1998) notion of 'language crossing': the use of a language which is not generally thought to 'belong' to the speaker. According to Rampton (1998: 291), crossing 'involves a sense of movement across quite sharply felt social or ethnic boundaries', raising 'issues of legitimacy that participants need to reckon with in the course of their encounter'. This sense of self-consciousness and transgression can be discerned in the responses of the participants above.

4. Pronunciation of Māori words

Another behaviour discussed with the participants was the pronunciation of Māori words. This was the most hotly contested topic among the participants, which is likely to be attributable to its unavoidability as a behaviour. The participants were asked whether they tended to pronounce Māori words 'either in a Māori way or more of a New Zealand English kind of pronunciation'. All participants were conscious of a perceived national change towards the pronunciation of Māori words according to Māori phonological principles, and most were able to discuss their reasons for choosing to adopt this change themselves or not. Supporters all viewed pronunciation of Māori words as a way of showing support for the Māori language, and all except one (born overseas) reported that they accordingly tried to pronounce Māori words in a Māori way:

> I think that's something that's pretty important […] there is […] a political aspect there […] I think in terms of showing respect to the language and the culture and the people that it's important to make an effort (M-S-30/35-PrI)

There was a wide range of alternative views on this matter, however, with Uninterested and English Only participants tending in particular to refer to their upbringing and the perceived 'naturalness' of using anglicised pronunciation[8]:

> It's just because it's my natural way and that's the way I've been cultured
> (M-EO-25/30-PbG)

> I don't consciously go and try and get out of my southern roots of pronunciation
> (M-U-40/45-PrI)

> It's just kind of how it happens (F-EO-30/35-PrNZ)

In addition to differences in views, there was extreme variability in reported behaviours, both within and across participants. Importantly, there appeared to be no direct link between positive attitudes towards the Māori language and 'Māori' pronunciation of Māori words. In some cases a speaker's 'Māori' pronunciation of Māori words indeed went alongside positive attitudes towards the language, and

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[8] An argument can be made that it is linguistically 'natural' to phonologically assimilate words from other languages into one's own language (see Deverson 1991: 22). On this basis, it is generally accepted that recent resistance to the anglicisation of Māori words has occurred for political/social not linguistic reasons (Deverson 1991: 26; Davies and Maclagan 2006: 89).

might even represent a conscious attempt to display these attitudes to others. This was not always the case, however, as some Uninterested and English Only participants claimed to use 'Māori' pronunciation for reasons of linguistic 'correctness' rather than attitudes towards the Māori language.

> I think it comes down just to…proper Eng…well and you can call it a Māori word but I just call it proper English as in that's how it's pronounced, that's how it's said so that's how people should (M-EO-40/45-PrI)

Conversely, although anglicised pronunciation sometimes reflected lack of interest in, or negative attitudes towards, the Māori language, this was not always so. A number of those with highly positive attitudes towards the Māori language, people who in fact wanted to pronounce Māori words in a 'Māori' way, did not do so in every instance. Stated reasons for this included concerns about getting it wrong, wondering if the person they were speaking to would understand them, nervousness about speaking Māori around Māori people, worries about how non-Māori would react, or a combination of these factors:

> I'm very conscious that you know my pronunciation is not great […] I do try and make an effort but I still feel slightly uncomfortable about that […] it's almost that…I'm trying to make the effort but consciously in the back of my mind is this actually even making an effort or…seeming worse (*laughs*) (M-S-25/30-PbG)

> There are some situations where people […] won't even know what I'm trying to say if I say it in a more correct pronunciation. I might start off a conversation using it correctly the first time but then I lapse into [an anglicised pronunciation] (F-S-30/35-PbM)

> If I was speaking to someone who is Māori then I would probably try my best to say it properly and if I was talking to […] people within the workplace who I know quite well I might I might lapse a wee bit and go back into the Pākehā type of speaking (M-S-40-45-PrI)

> I notice when I'm speaking to my [Māori] partner's family I get really nervous when I'm trying to pronounce sort of cities I've been to in Māori (F-S-25/30-PrI)

> I suppose it's the idea that [Māori people] might see me as you know trying to be all you know wonderful and you know (*posh tone*) 'oh of course I'm totally in tune with the Māori people' (*interviewer laughs*) you know that sort of […] tokenism type thing so in that respect actually I'm probably a little less

conscious or I'd probably put a little bit less effort into the pronunciation simply because of how that's going to be perceived (M-S-25/30-PbG)

I've got family members who are quite right wing and conservative people and […] I actually put a bit more effort in those contexts because it's kind of role modeling I guess (M-S-25/30-PbG)

It's funny how you know some things are OK and some things aren't OK you know I still struggle to say Taupo consistently because people seriously do kind of find it quite…difficult […] I've had people make assumptions (M-S-30/35-PrI)

I try and be reasonably staunch about [pronunciation] but I'm aware that when I'm in some situations I find there's a part of me that is trying to get me to deliberately mispronounce things which is quite interesting and I think […] it depends on the kind of environment that you're in, who you're talking to, the context…so I think if I'm feeling that I think there must be a large group of people who feel it even stronger and it would be a real barrier to it (M-S-30/35-PrI)

Some participants claimed they would use Māori pronunciation at work but not with their friends, with their friends but not at work, with their boyfriend but not with a taxi driver, and even, in the case of one participant, in the North Island but not in the South Island. While highlighting the attitudinal salience of the pronunciation of Māori words, this high degree of variability in reported behaviours suggests that it will often be very difficult to interpret what a particular instance of pronunciation represents, and underlines the problematic relationship between attitudes and behaviour, frequently attested to in language attitudes research. In many cases here, although attitude may act as a predisposition to behaviour, it does not always result in the intended behaviour. As with the results for the use of Māori words and phrases discussed above, these results reflect an extreme sensitivity among many participants to their social environment when it comes to using Māori, this itself perhaps indicating awareness of the continuing 'problem of tolerability' (May 2003) of the Māori language among many New Zealanders. The results also place constraints on the hypothesis stated in the introduction, namely that more positive attitudes towards the Māori language among non-Māori might lead to their greater use of the language in the context of New Zealand English.

5. Conclusion

This article has reported on research on the attitudes of non-Māori New Zealanders towards the use and pronunciation of Māori words in New Zealand English, the

results revealing complex mechanisms underlying the participants' reported engagement in these behaviours.

Whether using Māori words and phrases in English or pronouncing Māori words according to Māori principles are genuinely supportive behaviours for Māori language regeneration is a matter for debate. King (1995: 57) quotes Māori language policymaker Tipene Chrisp as having commented that 'I have noted a tendency among some people to use more and more Māori words in English sentences […] the intention is admirable, but ironically all that is happening is the English lexicon is being extended.' Moreover, it is arguably linguistically 'natural' to phonologically assimilate words from other languages into one's own first language (see Deverson 1991: 22). Perhaps more important here, however, is that a number of participants who did view these as desirable behaviours nevertheless felt unable to engage in them with ease. These results suggest a general awareness that the use and pronunciation of Māori words currently play an important symbolic role in reflecting – albeit in very complex ways – the attitudes of non-Māori New Zealanders towards the Māori language. In this sense, to the extent that the attitudes and behaviours of majority language speakers affect minority language regeneration, the use and pronunciation of Māori words by non-Māori New Zealanders is likely to influence to some degree the future development of Māori language regeneration in New Zealand.

Also apparent from these results is the potential influence of these behaviours on the development of New Zealand English itself. Macalister (2003) identifies an increasing presence of Māori words in New Zealand English, particularly in the area of social culture[9], which he argues reflects the increasing prominence of Māori culture among both Māori and non-Māori. In later research (Macalister 2007b) he discusses differences between older and younger speakers of New Zealand English in familiarity with Māori lexical items, finding that social culture items tend to be more frequently recognised by younger participants. The research presented in this article suggests the use of Māori words is also influenced by other social categories, such as groupings based on attitudes towards the Māori language. This may become a further source of increased variation within New Zealand English.

There are several directions for further research in this area. One important area relates to the attitudes of Māori New Zealanders towards the use of Māori in New

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[9] Macalister (2003: 50) makes a distinction between Material Culture and Social Culture lexical items, whereby: 'Material culture contains only nouns, and refers to objects that are visible and tangible, with *pa, whare* and *taiaha* being illustrative examples. Social culture, on the other hand, can include words other than nouns and incorporates the non-material aspects of a culture, such as concepts (*utu, tapu*), actions (*kōrero, haka*) and relationships (*kaumātua, kaitiakitanga*)'.

Zealand English, by both Māori and non-Māori. Tito (2008) reports on research undertaken with Māori secondary school students in the Wellington region, in which the students talked about the (mis)pronunciation and (mis)use of Māori words by non-Māori teachers, and how the students associated these with perceived negative attitudes on the part of the teachers towards both the Māori language and the Māori students themselves. These findings suggest specific ways in which the behaviours discussed in this article could impact on actual and potential speakers of the Māori language, but such studies are few and far between. Another area relates to the actual engagement of non-Māori in the behaviours discussed in this article, e.g. through recorded real-life data of their everyday interactions with others in different contexts (see e.g. de Bres et al 2010 on the use of Māori language in the workplace). Such research could shed further light on the extent to which non-Māori actually use Māori in the context of New Zealand English, what influences their engagement in these behaviours, and how others respond.

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