

HEMI HOSKINS

## Kia Whai Reo Te Wao



The traditional domains in which the Maori language has been able to survive or flourish have been severely reduced as a result of colonisation and associated language loss. The breakdown of traditional Maori communities and the economic and social pressures experienced by Maori have all contributed to our language decline as our people increasingly left their traditional communities for the urban centres in the hope of securing a better existence. This move away from papakāinga or traditional villages, combined with the restrictions upon access to traditional mahinga kai (food gathering places) has meant the domain of te taiao (the environment) and associated language around the hunting and gathering practices of our ancestors are now held by a declining number of repositories of the heritage language. Language maintenance in these particular domains has been

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increasingly challenged as advances in technology, techniques and equipment used in the modern harvest of wild foods have occurred faster than the evolution of the language itself.

If Māori are to effectively revitalise the language in domains that are traditionally culturally significant like that of food gathering practices, then it is essential that a strategy be developed that draws together the language experts and those with the knowledge of the cultural practice who may or may not be proficient in the language. Collaboration of these two groups will enable the development of vocabulary to keep up with the changes while maintaining the traditional knowledge base and perspective. This paper will examine possible models that draw together the specific knowledge of each field in an effort to regenerate the usage of the language in the domain from which it finds reference.



The environment known by our ancestors in pre-contact times was vastly different from that which we now know. Technologies were limited and survival was very labour intensive. The foods available were the various types of birds,

uncultivated plants such as aruhe (fern root), berries, fungi and some tree barks. Such dependence on naturally occurring food sources and all that influenced their availability saw an intimate relationship and understanding of the environment evolve and develop into a cultural framework aligned with the environment in which it resided. This framework is encapsulated in the creation traditions which order the universe through a pantheon of gods who are represented or manifested throughout the environment.

The ancestors went through a process of naming and categorizing their world and had developed systems to explain it and guide interactions. Nettle & Romaine (2000) draw special attention to this process in the respect of its significance to language stating that ‘...we can think of each language as a way of coming to grips with the external world and developing a symbolism to represent it so that it can be talked and thought about’ (p.69). Language is shown here as being directly related to belief, practice and culture.



Examples of the interconnectedness of culture and language are found in such expressions as:

Kāore e ārikarika te tama a Tu-mata-ika e rere nei”

This literally translates as there is an abundance of the descendants of Tu-mata-ika flying here. Tu-mata-ika is said to be the progenitor of kākā (a bush parrot), this saying is therefore a reference to high numbers of kākā, a lack of knowledge of the narratives however would make this saying extremely difficult to interpret, likewise a less knowledgeable speaker would not be able to express the same idea in the same way and would most likely have to give a literal translation which would shift us away from the preference of imagery and metaphor which is where the ethos or spirit of the language is reflected.

Further understanding is contained within the words themselves. Birds were an important source of food and consequently were frequently spoken of and interacted with which resulted in the development of a very particular vocabulary. Names for groups of birds were specific to the species. A flock of Tui was called a wiri kōkō, ducks were a kawai pāpera and pigeons a wiri kererū. Kākā had multiple names, a group of flying kākā was termed a pōkai kākā and feeding kākā were a whakarua kākā, kākā in moult was a kēkētoi and one with light plumage was a kākā reko. Feeding grounds again were specific with whakarua being a feeding ground for kākā and hapua being a feeding ground where various bird types gathered. Further to this there are examples of names for birds in particular stages of their growth cycles. The tūi is now the generic word for the parson bird (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*). Riley notes eight names depicting the growth of the tūi. The unfledged bird is a pī while fledglings are pikari. In early summer the male is called a kōpūrehe and the female a kouwha. Once grown the male is a kōkōuri and female a kōkōtea. A fully grown tūi is termed a pūrehe and once fat they are called kōkō. It is in understanding these names and the developmental stages of

the tūi that the underlying meanings of things such as the pae kōkō (the name for a snaring platform) find resonance, i.e. they are intended for the fat, mature tūi.

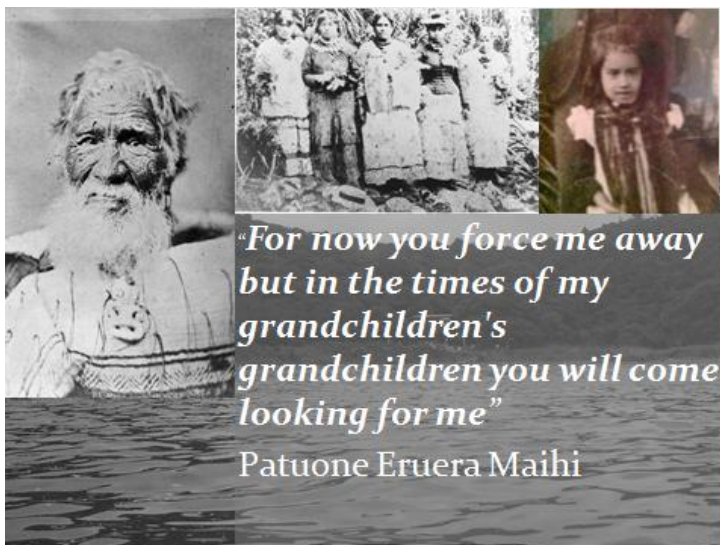


Shifts in knowledge systems, orders of society, religion, economy and population have all had influences on the usage and form of the Māori language. The establishment of cities, the deforestation of lands, the draining of swamps for farming and the requirements of work to function in society have led to an urban shift and shift in lifestyles. If we are to become further removed from the environment and its associated knowledge we stand to lose a lot. Nettle & Romaine (2000) make mention of this using the situation of Hawai'i as an example.

...Hawaiians probably knew more about the fish of their islands when Captain Cook first arrived in 1778 than scientists know today. Indeed, many Hawaiians have now forgotten more of that local knowledge accumulated and

handed down orally over the past 2000 years than western scientists will ever learn (p.56)

Māori in New Zealand are looking towards similar issues some of which have been caused by the extinction of native species. Some sources claim there were 70 species of birds particular to New Zealand at the time Europeans arrived and 28 of these were extinct within 50 years of their arrival. Further decline in bird numbers has meant it is not possible to practice sustainable harvest. This has lowered the ability to apply the traditional knowledge and vocabulary in a meaningful and current way where a lot of the traditional game has been lost.



The ways of old have in a huge part been lost and aspects of the language are going with them. This poses a threat towards the form of te reo , the significance of this is found in the understanding that language is a lot more than syntax and grammar but rather a window to the world and soul of another people.

Patuone is an ancestor of mine, the significance of him being the one making this statement is the era that he represented. Patuone was born before the arrival of Europeans and could remember the arrival of Captain Cook. Within his lifetime he saw Māori go from being a sovereign people to being colonised and going to war with the colonisers to retain land, culture and language. He was a signatory of the treaty and an esteemed orator with high ability in both Maori and English. He was a representation of pre-contact Māori in a post contact world, he could see the changes that were coming for his people. By the time of his grandchild's grandchild te reo had been lost from the family and Nan in her later years was making efforts to re-learn and teach the language within the family.

Although there are remnants of the old knowledge a lot is being forgotten. Languages evolve but in what way do we want the language to evolve and what will it resemble if we do not make an applied effort in maintaining the fundamental understandings that gave birth to it.

**Ka tō te rā ka whiti rānei**  
Demographics, current trends and direction

- 1996 census 48% of all Maori living in the South Island lived in Canterbury
- Two thirds of this population lived in Christchurch.
- An increasingly urban population with a dwindling connection

The degree of shift from tradition is reflected in statistics. The Canterbury region has an area of 45,346 square kilometres; at the time of the 1996 census 48% of all Maori living in the South Island lived in the Canterbury region with two thirds of this population living in Christchurch (Kokiri, 2001). We are becoming an urban people.



In urban living traditional environmental knowledge finds no relevance where we are in essence living outside of nature, removed from it in our buildings and cities constructed to keep us as insulated from it as possible (this building is a great example of this).

This whakatauki is one that is very widely known which refers to the different birds and their respective songs yet while at a Maori language conference I presented the sounds of the birds mentioned and none of them were correctly identified.

Furthermore the metaphor He korokoro tūi likens the sweet sound of a skilled orator to the beauty of the song of the TUI, the true depth of the meaning of the whakatauki however



is in knowing that the tui can learn the songs of other birds, some of the songs it sings may be remnants of birds which have long become extinct, therefore it is also recognising the speaker as a repository of knowledge and sayings of old. It is however only through deep understanding of the Tūi that the deeper meaning of the whakataukī is realised.

For a person to hear quotes pertaining to an aspect of nature having not experienced it, would the point be clear? Could they relate to it? Would it bring forth the same emotion and understanding? How long can the effectiveness of metaphor survive in the absence of experience? Could somebody relate to the anger of the Tawhirimatea, the god of wind having always been sheltered from his wrath? Do we still rely on the mauri, the life force of the forest for its and our survival? Is it still relevant and do we still possess the capacity to comprehend it as it once existed?



**Have the winds ceased to blow?**  
 Without influence, do the winds exist?  
 Decline in word usage and comprehension

Haumumu/Haupongi/pokipoki/pongipongi – eddying wind  
 Haurokuroku – Violent eddying wind  
 Kōangiāngi /Kōhengi /Kōtengitengi/matangi– breeze  
 Hau mano whenua/pararā – sudden violent wind  
 Manu waero rua/mumu/pārerarera/Tūpararā – violent wind  
 Popohau/ Rōpu – wind gust  
 Rāwaho / Tāwaha – wind from seaward  
 Urukāraerae – strong wind from sea  
 Apu hau – small gust  
 Hau rangawhenua – early morning wind of short duration  
 Mawake – wind of short duration  
 Pipipi o te rangi – cloud stretched out showing incoming wind

To follow on from this, observations have been made that it is extremely difficult to teach contextual language relating to weather within the class. One class in particular could not elaborate beyond three basic adjectives, from their perspective it was either raining, cloudy or sunny. With the weather having less impact on their lives there is a lower necessity to take such notice of it. Their understanding of their cell phones however was very in depth hence the adjustment to the previous whakatauki.

Above is a small collection of names relating to wind provided purely as an example. Given the current trends the sustained knowledge and usage of these words is becoming less likely.

Additional to this areas had specific genealogy's to explain the interactions and developments of weather patterns, these were useful tools in predicting weather changes and held within them great understanding however the necessity for possessing this knowledge is diminishing and traditions have been standardised fracturing their frameworks in doing so.

We are presented with a difficult task of making these concepts meaningful and useful again which could require some adjustment or broadening to re-apply them to avoid fare welling them forever.

**Transition piece**

The degree of development in the hunting and gathering domain was realised while writing articles in te reo about modern food gathering activities. The subject matter was ducks which have long been an important food source for Māori yet the language has not kept up with the changes in harvest practice. The most basic piece of equipment utilised by the duck shooter of these times is a duck caller, a basic tube containing a reed to produce a duck sound. Although the pre-contact ancestors did call birds there is no name for such a device.

Further analysis of word usage revealed patterns of lexis development with higher levels of interaction seeing the vocabulary develop more specifically. Pigs which were introduced by Captain Cook and as such are alongside the western ship rat the earliest animal introduced to Māori. A boar is called a rei puta which is a word specific to the breed, animals introduced at a later date are generally defined in sex by the generic terms tame (male) or uwaha (female). The more

specific naming of animals is more reflective of the older practice as was exemplified with the birds. Māori are not particular in this pattern where the red deer has a number of names for its growth cycle starting as a fawn, growing to a yearling hind or spiker and developing into hinds and stags. At this point we simply call deer male, female or young.



Not all areas have the same animals and the topography varies greatly meaning that hunting techniques do as well. Technologies have developed accordingly and if we are to use the Maori language throughout the whole contemporary version of the domain there is a need for a lot of vocabulary development. The spear has been replaced by the gun which has continued to develop. The effective range of what would now be considered an average rifle set up is in the vicinity of 500m with many being effective to and over 1200m. With the assistance of laser range finders, a ballistics calculator which can be run by an iPod, blue tooth tethered weather stations to measure wind speed and air density and location recording GPS units we can now measure elements that have

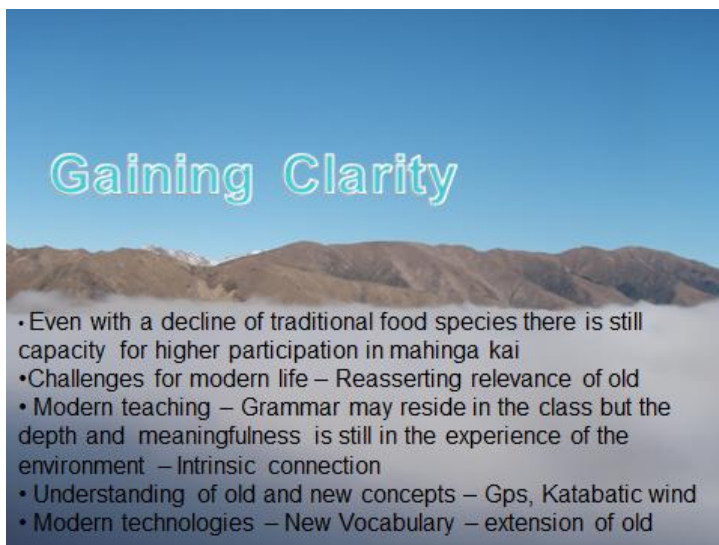
traditionally only been estimated allowing for very long range shot placement. We are clearly seduced by technology and the evolution of technology is a natural development however it is important to see that language develops and evolves from an appropriate base which can attempt to retain some traditional reference, context and meaning as a way of maintaining relevance and re-applying knowledge that would otherwise become redundant.

The parts of a rifle for example, the barrel is called the arahamoamo where ara is the conveyance and hamoamo is the name for a type of clay but also the small stones used by Maori as bullets in the early wars.

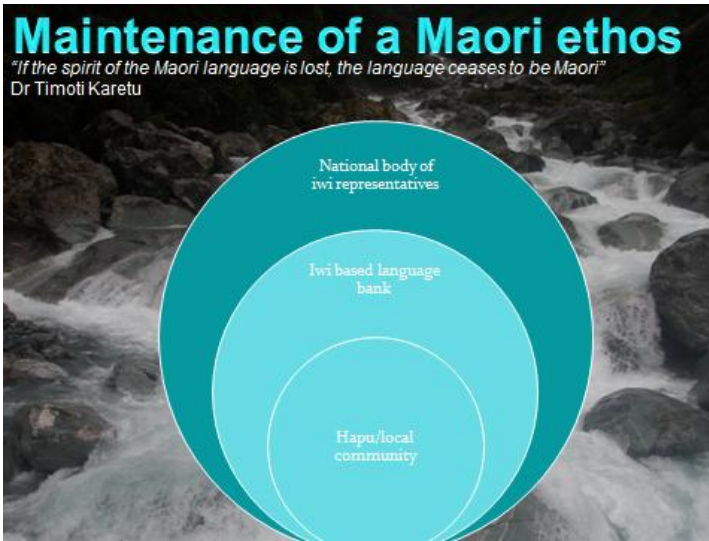


Further examples are seen in the names for winds and in particular, katabatic currents. Katabatic wind currents are spoken of in alpine hunting situations. They vary throughout the day and are a downward wind current in the evening and early morning and upward currents in the warmer parts of the day, there tendencies need to be known by the hunter to avoid fouling the area with their scent. Katabatic winds are caused

by shifts in land temperature and the resultant changes in the nearby air temperature and density. Hau Rangawhenua is an old word for an early morning wind of short duration and could have been in reference to this. A loss of knowledge of the names of the particular winds would make it increasingly difficult to develop a vocabulary for these new concepts.



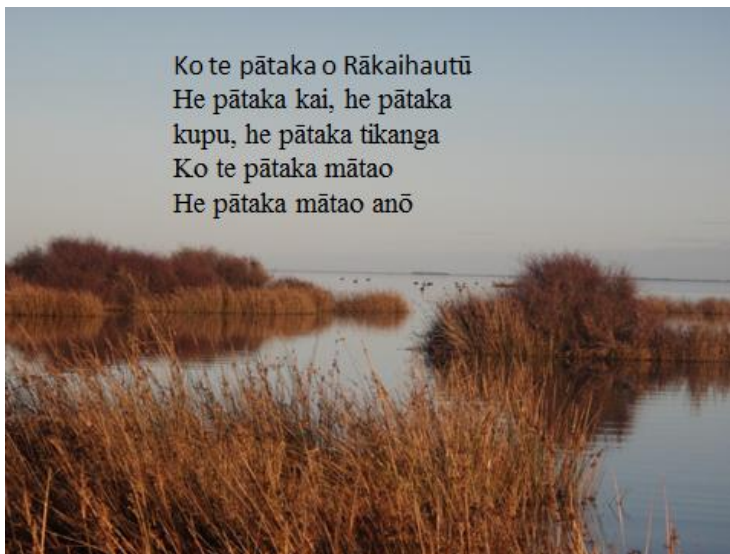
To summarise issues of language maintenance in this domain, we have become more urban, our interaction with the environment and utilisation of traditional food gathering places has decreased through loss of traditional foods and changes in the environment. Concepts have become increasingly simplified and standardised resulting in a narrowing of word use. New species have arrived with new techniques and the language hasn't kept up.



In looking at solutions to remedy the issue it becomes clear that we require a model of interaction which emphasises regional language maintenance due to the nature of words and concepts being regionally specific. Focus should be on encouraging interaction between those who still possess the relative knowledge or have a passion for it and those who are engaged in environment based activities to aid in appropriate transposition of concepts and vocabulary. Products of these interactions could then be disbursed through iwi led initiatives to ensure that the language is transmitted to their descendants living outside of their area however regional focus would be on the language particular to that region. A national body of vocabulary could then ascertain what words need to be developed and what has already been developed by various areas much as was seen with Te Taura Whiri.

As an additional note, due to the urban drift and statistics of language use in the home, education is currently one of the main supporters of the maintenance and development of Te Reo. It is logical then that regional education providers actively

engage and interact with local iwi authorities in developing their language content. Effective practice in this would see them align with local protocols and integrate local exemplars into their delivery programme. This should include interaction with the local environment as the restrictive nature of a classroom has been explained earlier.



For Te Reo to maintain its unique form and retain its deeper meanings there is a need for applied efforts in engaging the domain from which it was derived and where it finds reference. There have been huge changes in the environment but there is still capacity to transpose the traditional equivalents to the contemporary. There is a need to re-engage with the environment to ensure the evolution of Te Reo is based on appropriate foundations, so much of our culture having is derived from core relationships with the environment and the practice of mahinga kai, to lose that breadth from our linguistic capability forever, will be to lose those things at the core of the Māori worldview, the relationships with the atua



and with the spiritual self. Although we cannot control the direction of the winds that drive us towards change we can control how we trim our sails and influence where we end up.

I leave you with this statement, Rākaihautū was an ancestor of the south with magical abilities, the Canterbury peninsula was called te pātaka o Rākaihautū, the food store house of Rakaihautu in recognition of all the food. This phrase tells us that te pātaka o rākaihautu is a storeplace of food, knowledge, practice belief and language while a fridge is merely a fridge and will hold nothing more than food.

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