

“Tikaŋa Māori, Reo Māori ki te Ipuraŋi”

‘Māori Culture & Language On the Internet

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of General and Applied Linguistics

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Nā Te Taka Keegan,
nō Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato.

Ka hiki atu taku wae i tēnei whenua
ka moanatia i muri i au.
Pūrekireki wīwī māna tātou
hei huti ake ki te ao nei
ka puta ka ora.

Introduction

First of all I would like to state I am not an authority on Māori culture, though I am a Māori. I am also not an authority on Māori language though I am a speaker of the language. I am a second language learner though I do consider te reo Māori to be my native language. I am proud that currently the only language of my two youngest children is te reo Māori and are committed to the struggle of returning the Māori language to a language of everyday usage.

What I will speak about will be experiences, thoughts and work that I have encountered in 7 years of teaching computing through the medium of Māori language and 4 years of active research into Māori language on the Internet.

Māori Culture on the Internet

Cybermarae, cyberwaka, and cyberwānanga are all terms that are being applied to Māori moving into the Internet environment. Personally I think that some of the notions that are portrayed are becoming a little too idealistic. The reality is that this type of environment had not previously existed in Māori culture. All cultures (and languages) are subject to change as environments are continually changing. To survive Māori must in cooperate the new environments while holding true to cultural values. If the values stay true in the new environment then I believe the culture survives.

Here are 5 examples of how aspects of Māori culture can find relevance on the Internet:

1) *Whakawhanaungatanga, manaaki tangata, aroha mai aroha atu* are all Māori proverbs that talk about concepts of working collectively, communally, cooperatively and in a shared and united environment (especially at a iwi, hapū and whānau level). The support of the collection, protection and dissemination of resources and information was and is an important aspect of the Māori culture. Likewise, the support of the collection, protection and dissemination of resources and information was and is an important aspect of the Internet culture. I believe the single greatest factor in the explosion of the Internet was and is peoples' ability to share. Maybe this concept was derived from Māori culture, and if it was, well that's okay too!

2) *Kanohi ki te kanohi*, is another important Māori proverb literally meaning face to face. It implies that if correct contact must be made then people should meet face to face, one on one, so that no misunderstandings, misconstruing, misinterpretations, misapprehensions, misconstructions can occur. It implies that by taking the time and energy to arrange and travel to meet somebody you are showing the respect and homage that this person is worthy of your efforts. The Internet pretty much strives to do away with this situation. Everything and every person (in theory) can be brought to you in the comfort and convenience of your home. Thus is this aspect of culture lost in the new environment of the Internet? I believe it to be the contrary, and that the Internet makes this proverb even more applicable!!

3) *Ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi*, is usually translated as the old net is cast aside and the new net goes fishing. I often think that this translation is somewhat liberal. To me it's more like when the elderly person no longer becomes capable then the younger person seizes the opportunity. I think this proverb is very relevant in terms of computing and the Internet.

4) *Ko Mauripene taku kuia, ko Tuhikorero taku koroua*, is the title of a paper that was presented by Wayne Ngata at the Oral History Conference, Massey University, 5 June 1999. In it he talks about how modern technology is disenfranchising our kuia and koroua. This change is making our old people redundant. His focus was on *mōteatea*, which are, he stated, used to summarise our existence. The (traditional) methods of acquiring that knowledge was to listen from the feet of the elders. This does not exist anymore.

This has been superseded by new practices predominately Western. We have lost huge chunks of knowledge and the method of transferring it. Fact; our old people are dying. 'the soul of the song has been lost' but here are the words. 'Kāore e roa ka 3D holograph hei whakaatu i ngā mōteatea'.

These give rise to grave concerns. Who controls the knowledge? Who are the guardians? Currently there is us, who work in tertiary institutions, who are relatively unrestricted in our utilization of these types of resources. Māori Studies departments, of Universities, of Polytechnics, of Museums, of Libraries, of broadcasting institutions have become, or think we are, the guardians or saviours of our history, the new fonts of knowledge. Indeed we become, according to Wayne Ngata, the EMMID, an elite Maori middle class intellectual do-gooder. The next generation of modern technology, is, of course, the Internet. 5) *He tapu te Kōrero*. I have heard rumblings about how Māori should be suspicious of the Internet, especially with regard to the unapproved dissemination of tapu information. While I agree we should always be wary of the consequences of our actions, I do not believe this argument holds much water in terms of the Internet. Quite simply, if we have information that is tapu then don't publish it on the Internet! Did this aspect of the Internet prevent one of the world's most private and suspicious organisations in the world from using and indeed creating the Internet? I refer to, of course, the US Government. In fact Pākehā organisations and business's treat the topic very seriously, terms like information privacy, copyright, and

intellectual property rights are all Pākehā concepts. Yet these people use the Internet extensively.

Māori Future on the Internet

Te Hiringa i te Mahara is a pilot project where 50 Māori teachers spread throughout the country are using ICT to help overcome work load pressures. Each teacher is given a laptop pc's with Internet accessibility. The teachers are grouped together into 5 clusters and are given hardware to enable them to do audio conferencing. I was asked to give a presentation to them listing the Māori language resources available on the web. I was very apprehensive at first never having given an audio presentation before, especially to Māori. I found myself questioning the cultural appropriateness of this type of delivery. Normally before meeting a group such as this there would be a pōwhiri and an opportunity for mihimihi.

The time came and I dialled in. The audio conference was already online and in progress. Petera Hudson, the organiser of the PD work, realised I had dialled in and asked that they suspended what they were talking about because I was now online. He passed it over to one of the kaumātua, who greeted me then performed a karakia. Following this I had an opportunity for reply, then each member of the group came on and said who they were, where they were from and greeted me. It was like a whole weight had been lifted off my shoulders, as I had now met them. I now knew where they were from, who they were and which ones were relations. I was relieved as we had greeted each other in an appropriate manner. It was in fact a pōwhiri conducted on the Internet, and had the desired effect. I believe, that that morning some important cultural values were able to be upheld in the Internet environment. Maybe this is a glimpse of how Māori culture will be in the future.

The Māori population is significantly younger in age structure than the general New Zealand age structure.

Figures from the Dept. of Statistics for 1996 state:

- ▷ 37.5% of Māori are less than 15 years old, compared with 23% of the general population.
- ▷ The medium age of Māori was 21.4 years, compared with 32.3 years of the total NZ population, (i.e. 50% of the population are below this age, 50 % above).

▷ Currently 1 in 4 children is Māori, it is projected that in 50 years time, 1 in 3 children will be Māori.

This has two really important effects. First any changes in the education system will impact on Māori more. Second, which group are the quickest to pick up and run with computers? The younger generation!! The relevance of these two facts should not, I believe, be underestimated.

It is said we are moving into a **knowledge economy**. This being an economy in which the generation and exploitation of knowledge plays the predominant part in the creation of wealth. If we look at New Zealand's previous economy we can see that Māori have performed outstandingly well. First we had the farming economy. In the 1840's and 1850's Māori in certain areas concentrated their activities in farming. We became the primary producers of agricultural produce, the millers of flour and the transporters of their products to the markets. The central North Island saw the building of 49 mills and Māori had over 85 trading vessels working out of Auckland and the Hawke's Bay travelling to New South Wales and as far away as California. An economic infrastructure was established, but maybe due to its success it became a threat and was ultimately brought down.

Following this we had the industrial economy, which led to a lot of work for Māori although this was mostly detrimental as the employment was generally in unskilled labour. Now we have the knowledge economy and I think Māori, through the use of the Internet, can take advantage and be at the forefront of the knowledge economy.

However to do so I believe Māori must think in terms of a **dual knowledge economy**, one local and relevant to Māori and another international and relevant to all nations. The two markets have different characteristics, different types of information would be used and there is a different cost and return consideration. At times the two economies could overlap e.g. the Māori knowledge economy listing say myths of a certain area could assist Māori of that area both locally and internationally to retain history and learn from that history certain characteristics and rules of that land. The international economy could benefit from the same myths by increasing tourism and through ecommerce increasing trade in goods that were produced from that land e.g. H2Go.

Māori Language on the Internet

Māori language is happening on the net. An analysis of email will show that in general, the language that is used in messaging is the language that the people conversing are most comfortable with. Personally I estimate that a quarter of my conversations via email are in Māori. What's more the expansion of the net is allowing this to occur at an international level. Previously it would be difficult to find opportunities for conversing in Māori unless you happened to be in New Zealand. The amount of quality Māori language web pages is on the increase, as the number of 'rubbish' pages is on the decrease. The wheels are starting to gather momentum.

Māori Language Difficulties on the Internet

I would like to totally support Rei Harlow's paper, called, "Issues in Māori Language Planning and Normalisation" that was given at the GAL seminar on the 11th of March. In it he states that shaping a language involves 3 major activities. Graphisation: e.g. the orthography of the written language; this is a major issue when signifying the lengthened vowel. Standardisation: should there be a uniformity of dialect for schooling and in the use of official documents? Modernisation: how do we create new words, the computer industry is one area where we definitely require assistance. Also who has ultimate authority over these language shaping roles. Is it the Taura Whiri (Māori language commission), is it the producer of the greatest amount of Māori language material (currently the Ministry of Education) or is it in fact the people out there who are using the language the most. I believe it is high time the proposed University of Māori Language was created and given the mandate to address some of these issues. I believe that the ideal place for it to be located would be here in Waikato and I cannot see any reason why work hasn't begun in this direction.

Without a doubt the greatest currently difficulty in written Māori is displaying the written vowel. As you people are almost certainly aware the Māori lengthened vowel can be displayed as a vowel with a bar or macron over it. This particular symbol has a problem in previous and most current computers because the standard character set that is used, ISO8859, does not have this symbol. Currently the most common way to fix this problem has been to take one of the characters that are in the set, and alter it. The

umlaut or dieresis character has been selected and with the usage of a Māori font this character has been altered to appear as a macron character. While this is a solution, it does have 3 drawbacks.

1) the umlaut symbol now cannot be displayed apart from the mid sentence altering of fonts.

2) Mac and PC's map these characters to a different position. This means that the transferring of files and messages across the different platforms results in an incorrect character being displayed in place of the macron, the classic example being email messages between different platforms.

3) While the font can be altered in the application program, usually it cannot be altered in the operating system. This means that if a macron symbol is generated for say the naming of a file, the system will still display the umlaut symbol, commonly referred to as the double dot.

Fortunately this problem is an international problem and consequently a solution is on the way. The computer industry is incorporating a new character set standard, called Unicode. Unicode allows for up to 65,000 characters as opposed to the 256 characters resident in the ISO standard. One set of these characters in the Unicode standard is the macron characters. Most web browsers released in the last 18 months support the Unicode character set, as does Windows 2000 the operating system of the machine running this presentation. It has been suggested that within a year it will be an industry standard.

Conclusions

The Māori language and culture, can and is happening on the net.

Koia nā te mānuka kua whakatokoria. Nō reira, kawe ake, kawe ake, kawe ake!