

Maori Words in New Zealand English

introduction from the *Dictionary of Maori Words in New Zealand English*, Oxford University Press
edited by John Macalister

01

Sometimes it takes outsiders to identify the obvious. For instance, arriving in New Zealand for the first time an Australian journalist complained that he hadn't expected to need a dictionary just to read the newspaper.¹ On another occasion, a British tourist, when spying a headline announcing attempts to extinguish *iwi* rights, assumed it was a typographical error and was shocked by this deliberate extinction of the kiwi.² And we have all heard of young New Zealanders on their OE who reportedly string together Maori place names when asked to perform a national song for others. There is no getting away from it: New Zealand English is different, and it is Maori words that form the most distinctive feature of New Zealand English. Linguists have calculated that Maori words generally account for roughly six words out of every thousand in written texts, with proper nouns forming a significant proportion of these. During the course of a day, speakers of English in New Zealand are going to read and hear and use a large number of Maori words, perhaps beginning with the morning radio announcer's cheery 'kia ora'. Often we may not realise that a word is of Maori origin, so familiar have many of them become.

This book aims to present a thorough (but inevitably incomplete) picture of the Maori word presence in New Zealand English. The book is *comprehensive* rather than *exhaustive*, as the Maori words in use are forever changing. A word may enjoy a brief moment in the spotlight and then disappear without trace. Or it may capture the popular imagination and enjoy widespread, on-going use. A word may be limited to certain clearly defined contexts, or be made redundant by social changes. Sometimes a Maori word is adapted, often by being combined with an English language component, to become something new (and frequently entertaining). There will, therefore, certainly be words in this book that readers have not previously encountered, just as there will be words that are missing.

But, by way of introduction, and before discussing the types of words that are included in this book, I will explain how and why this most distinctive feature of New Zealand English, the Maori word presence, came about.



Maori Words in New Zealand English

02 Beginnings

For several centuries the sole language of the country that would eventually be known as New Zealand was te reo Maori, the Maori language. But then, in 1769, HMS *Endeavour* sailed into Poverty Bay. This marked the beginning of many changes, largely occasioned by sustained contact between two cultures and two languages, English and te reo Maori. The European sailors had planned ahead to some extent and had brought with them a Tahitian priest, Tupaia, who they hoped could act as interpreter should they come across other indigenous people on this voyage of exploration. They did, and, happily, the Tahitian and Maori languages proved to be mutually comprehensible. But, despite Tupaia's presence, the first attempts at communication were often marked by gestures, incomprehension, and laughter. Gradually, however, this changed. Maori names made their way onto the pages of private journals and from there, after the *Endeavour's* return to Britain, into the public domain, through publications by Cook and Joseph Banks, followed by the writings of other late eighteenth and early nineteenth century explorers. For, in their dealings with Maori people, and their exploration of a country that was new to them, these English-speakers had the opportunity and the motivation to acquire items of Maori vocabulary. Hence, the origins of New Zealand English can be traced to the language contact situation that arose in 1769 with the arrival of Captain James Cook and his crew aboard the *Endeavour*. And while New Zealand English has a number of distinguishing features, it is the lexical influence of te reo Maori that most distinguishes New Zealand English from other varieties of English.

The *Endeavour* sailed away, but the return to normalcy for Maori was temporary. More expeditions from Europe followed and in their wake came commercial adventurers. Sealers were operating from New Zealand by the 1790s; whalers came and went too, although the first shore whaling station would not be established until 1827. A small number of escaped convicts from the Australian penal colony crossed the Tasman, with some establishing themselves with Maori tribes. And in 1814 Samuel Marsden founded the first mission station in New Zealand, in the Bay of Islands. A European, English-speaking presence in

Maori Words in New Zealand English

03

and meagre language in some respects, it is very copious in others. They have a dual as well as singular and plural and so many nice shades in the personal pronouns that it is quite puzzling. I have taken a Maori servant to teach me, ...¹¹

In the journals and letters of these early colonists there is clear evidence that they borrowed the words they needed from Maori. Apart from proper nouns, these tended to be the names of the native flora and fauna and of unfamiliar customs and physical items. During the early colonial period there was an openness to borrowing from te reo Maori.

From about 1860, however, this began to change. There were multiple causes of this change. More and more migrants arrived, and with this rapid expansion of the European population there was a consequent shift toward Maori being a minority in the country. The impact of previously unencountered diseases also contributed to the numerical decline of Maori. Increasingly, as patterns of settlement shifted, there was geographic separation of the two language communities. Also very significant were the New Zealand Wars of the 1860s. Wars do not, after all, tend to breed tolerance and understanding between the opposing peoples. The legacy of these conflicts cemented the geographic and social separation between Maori and Pakeha, as Sir Apirana Ngata later recalled:

- They had embraced civilisation and its arts. They had erected flour-mills, grown their own wheat, ground their own flour; they raised pigs, and they sent produce to the Auckland market. Their canoes filled the Waikato river, taking their produce to the Waikato Heads, and to Manukau to be sold in Auckland. Then came the Waikato war. The defeated Waikatos retired to nurse their grievances. Their lands were confiscated, they remained in sullen retirement until the year 1896.¹²

The Maori words that had been borrowed earlier did not suddenly disappear from use, but far fewer Maori words entered the New Zealand English lexicon during the period from 1880 to 1970 than had in the preceding decades. This was also the time when New Zealand, which had forged an identity independent of its British origins during the early years of colonisation, was re-establishing its links with Britain. There was a desire to emphasise the Britishness of New Zealand. This may be the time when *parson bird* enjoyed its greatest popularity as a



Maori Words in New Zealand English

04

synonym for *tui*, when the *weka* was most likely to be the *Maori hen*, and when New Zealand had *red*, *white*, and *black pines* rather than *rimu*, *kahikatea*, and *matai*. Yet it was also the time when Maori words were widely used to express a New Zealand identity, often found for example as the names of ships and of racing horses, and when Maori words were being applied to non-Maori contexts. One of the earliest words to lose its cultural specificity was *whare*. From being the name for a Maori house or building, it became the general term for a hut or cottage, often of rough construction, and became well established in rural use for farm workers' accommodation, whether a shepherd's hut or more substantial sleeping quarters.

The language situation remained fairly static until around 1970, when two events occurred. The first was that Britain entered the EEC, as it then was, and New Zealand was forced to re-assess its relationship not only with Britain, but with the rest of the world. The second was the completion of a considerable shift in the distribution of the Maori population in New Zealand. At the end of the Second World War, 75 per cent of Maori lived rurally; by 1975, 75 per cent were urban dwellers.¹⁵ The geographical separation between Maori and Pakeha that had existed for a hundred years was over. Increasingly, non-Maori needed to talk about Maoridom, and therefore had to acquire the words to do so. Events such as the 1975 land march and the 1981 Springbok Tour raised awareness of issues affecting Maoridom. Central government played a role, establishing the Waitangi Tribunal, authorising Maori language educational providers, and making te reo Maori the official language of the country. Electoral reform in the 1990s greatly increased Maori representation in Parliament, giving Maori greater opportunity to contribute to and to be heard in the nation's discourse.

Yet, while all these factors are important, the presence of Maori words in New Zealand English cannot be explained simply by referring to New Zealand's general history, demography and population distribution. Another key consideration is the state and status of te reo Maori. After all, the status and vigour of the Maori language is clearly going to affect the degree to which it can be a source of influence on New Zealand English. The history of the Maori language has been written about and commented on at length, and while there may be occasional slight shifts in emphasis it is universally agreed that a starting position of strength and dominance for the Maori language was followed by an extended period of bilingualism, which increasingly entailed Maori learning English

Maori Words in New Zealand English

05

rather than English-speakers learning Maori. By the 1950s a new generation of Maori who spoke only English was following on from a generation that had learnt te reo as a second language in childhood.¹⁴ Various factors have been mentioned as contributing to this shift, including broadcasting, inter-marriage, and economic changes (such as the end of subsistence farming as a viable life-style),¹⁵ but the most important causes are seen to have been urbanisation and education.¹⁶

Much has been made of the role of schools, and particularly the native schools, in contributing to the shift from Maori to English. People have spoken and written about their experience of being punished for speaking Maori at school, at least until the 1930s. While there is no dispute that such punishment did occur, it is also clear that the response to the use of Maori in schools varied. It ranged from banning the language to tolerating it to actively employing it. James Belich summarised the situation in an engaging manner:

At one extreme was draconian assimilation; at the other were close relations between school and marae, along with good education, and the encouragement of Maori identity and arts, if not language.

Even the language issue has ambiguities. Often, Maori themselves wanted their children taught English because they realised that this gave them independent access to global knowledge. ... Urbanisation from 1945 did much more damage to the Maori language than did the Native Schools.¹⁷

Regardless, however, of the causes, the direction te reo Maori was taking was towards language loss and language death. Realisation of the situation led to the establishment of the first kohanga reo in 1981, followed by legislation to create kura kaupapa Maori and whare wananga, in 1989 and 1990 respectively. A Maori Language Commission was also established, in 1987. These and other initiatives demonstrated a commitment to the preservation of te reo Maori.

The efforts made to revitalise the Maori language coincided with New Zealand's re-assessment of its identity and its relationship to the rest of the world following Britain's entry into Europe. The urbanisation of the Maori people created a demand for Maori language education in an urban environment, and urbanisation also heightened the 'visibility' of Maoridom to non-Maori, who were a predominantly urban population. As a result, both the need for borrowings and the opportunity to acquire them existed.



Maori Words in New Zealand English

06

Thus, we can see that a range of factors caused the relationship between New Zealand English and te reo Maori to develop in the way it has. There is, however, one final point to consider. Words from one language enter another when people choose to use them, and the key people in effecting this change are bilinguals, because only a person with knowledge of both languages is in a position to introduce a word from one to the other. Not that a person has to be a fluent speaker of either or both languages; indeed, it is not even necessary to be a native speaker of the language that is being borrowed from. We have already met examples of individuals creating a linguistic bridge between two monolingual communities, people such as Tupaia, James Cook, Joseph Banks, and Jane Williams. The process can be imagined like this: Cook, for example, learns that *pa* is the Maori word for the distinctive fortified villages that are almost a feature of the landscape he is encountering. He uses this word in his journals and in conversation with other English-speakers, who in turn find the word useful and start to use it. Thus it is borrowed from te reo Maori and enters the English language.¹⁸

It was not, of course, only the well-known, published figures who served this bridging function. One group that is sometimes neglected in the discussion of New Zealand's past is the Pakeha Maori, individuals who lived among Maori, initially as Maori although later more often as traders. These people, as Trevor Bentley has pointed out, gave Maori 'an understanding of the European world, by providing Maori words for European concepts and by serving as valuable reference points for future dealings with Pakeha'.¹⁹ Many of these Pakeha Maori were also in a position to give Pakeha a similar understanding of the Maori world, both in their role as trading go-betweens and when they later re-entered European society. In doing so, they gained prestige in both language communities. They were also important conduits for the passage of words between monolingual groups.

Thus, Pakeha Maori, along with the European explorers, missionaries and early settlers all contributed to the first wave of borrowing from te reo Maori. An interesting question is why the impact of these borrowings on New Zealand English was not greater, why there are not more words of Maori origin in our variety of English. We have seen, for example, that Maori words were extremely well integrated into the written English of the missionary Jane Williams. Various historical reasons have been discussed above, but it may also be that attitudes towards those Europeans with some facility in the Maori language were

Maori Words in New Zealand English

07

negative. And, after all, speakers' attitudes are the factor that will ultimately determine the development of the relationship between two languages. If people do not hold favourable views about members of a particular language group, why would they want to borrow from that language? In New Zealand it is certainly the case that at least some of the agents of possible change in the language contact situation, such as the Pakeha Maori, were perceived as opposed to the colonial state; they were not part of mainstream society and were regarded as being too pro-Maori, especially after the 1860s. Monolingual English-speakers were unlikely to adopt words used by groups of people who were regarded as well-disposed towards another group of people, Maori, who were widely regarded as being generally antagonistic to the colonial enterprise. It is likely that missionaries were similarly distrusted, and Walter Buller, a missionary's son, found that his knowledge of the Maori language counted against him when he sought election to Parliament (unsuccessfully); his opponents labelled him a 'Maori man', a person sympathetic towards Maori.²⁰ Attitudes to te reo Maori and to its speakers, whether Maori or Pakeha, are therefore likely to have affected the degree of influence that the Maori language has had on New Zealand English.

The interplay of all these factors explains why the Maori presence in New Zealand English has developed in the way it has. It also explains why, as a result of catalysts after 1970, New Zealand English experienced its second wave of borrowings from te reo Maori, and in this second wave the emphasis has been on words to do with the social culture of Maoridom. Words to do with roles and relationships and concepts, such as *kaumatua* and *kuia* and *kaitiakitanga*, entered the language. And thus, today, visitors from overseas may feel they need a dictionary when reading the newspaper.

Why borrow?

The history of New Zealand English and its relationship with te reo Maori has sometimes been described as a story of take and give. In this view, English-speakers *took* the words they needed from te reo Maori in the pre-colonial and early colonial periods, but, by contrast, in the wave of borrowing after 1970 Maori *gave* the words to English-speakers. Such an explanation has an elegant simplicity, but fails to account for a speaker's decision to use the borrowed words. It is easy to forget that



Maori Words in New Zealand English

08

what happens in a language is the result of linguistic choices made by language-using individuals. When enough speakers make the same choice, that choice becomes a feature of the language. In this section we examine a variety of reasons why English-speakers in New Zealand may have chosen to incorporate Maori words into their speech.

English is a language that has always borrowed freely from other languages, and it continues to do so to this day. The linguist Otto Jespersen called this characteristic of the English language ‘linguistic omnivorousness’.²¹ The most obvious reason for borrowing a term from another language is to give something new a name. Cook, Banks, the sealers and whalers, the missionaries, and the colonists who followed them all encountered and needed to name the new — new places to be marked on maps, new birds and trees and fish, new people with their own well-developed material and social cultures. This motivation is well illustrated by Charlotte Godley, who wrote in a letter home in 1850:

I don't know what to call it. It is more like one of those mermaid looking-glasses with a handle, in shape, than anything else, and made of the semi-transparent green stone which you see amongst Chinese curiosities; about a foot long or more, and with very sharp edges.²²

Probably lacking the word *mere* herself, and, even if knowing it, certainly aware that the word would be meaningless to her correspondent in England, she resorted to drawing on parallels from their shared world in her attempt to accurately describe this new object. The new object needed a name, however, and that name would be found in *te reo Maori*.

Of course, neither explorers nor settlers borrowed a Maori word every time they encountered something new. Borrowing is only one of the available methods that language users have of incorporating the newly experienced into their lexicon. Another, and one which was not infrequently used among the European settlers, is the semantic loan, whereby a new meaning is added to an existing word. The settlers, for example, did not borrow *harakeke* but chose to continue to use *flax*, while acknowledging that the New Zealand plant was not the same as their familiar English variety. Charlotte Godley, again, makes this clear: ‘Our flax is, as of course you know, very different from your idea of it at home, and only got the name of flax from its having the same kind of fine strong white fibre.’²³

Maori Words in New Zealand English

09

The obvious need to give something new a name is not the sole factor motivating borrowing, especially given that the English language is rich in synonyms. The use of Maori words such as *kahawai*, *kauri* and *kiwi* is easily explained, as there are no readily available English language alternatives for those features of the environment. But why would a speaker use *iwi* when *tribe* is already available, or *waka* when *canoe* is perfectly acceptable? Although it is not possible to establish exactly why a speech community adopted a particular borrowing, reasonable inferences may be drawn. To understand why Maori words have entered New Zealand English, it is worth examining the possible motivations for preferring to use a Maori word over an existing English word.

The first is that a word is borrowed when it provides the most economical way of referring to a thing. When there are no easy synonyms available, the tendency is to prefer the more economical loanword, once its meaning has been understood by the wider speech community. Thus, while *village square*, *fortified village* and *war dance* were all used in the nineteenth century, today it would be unusual to hear anything other than *marae*, *pa*, and *haka*. Conversely, the relative brevity of *fantail* may explain why *piwakawaka* is not well established in New Zealand English.

The use of Maori words also allows New Zealanders to express a distinctive national identity, as young Kiwis on their OE are said to do. Maori words have been used for a wide range of purposes, such as naming horses and ships, since the early days of colonisation. This can be seen as an expression of an emerging New Zealand identity. The trend towards the establishment of *tui* and *weka*, displacing *parson bird* and *wood hen*, can be seen as part of this process — using distinctively New Zealand names for distinctively New Zealand birds.

Changes in the use of the word *kiwi* are another, and perhaps the clearest, expression of this motivation. From being the name of a bird unique to New Zealand, the bird came to be seen as a symbol of New Zealand, although not at first the only symbol — New Zealand was also the land of the moa, and *Maoriland*. However, the kiwi emerged as the national bird, and from there it was a short step to becoming a term for New Zealand or a New Zealander. This appears to have become an entrenched usage during and as a result of the Second World War. Today, this sense of *kiwi* is rivalled in frequency of occurrence by a new sense, *kiwi* as the New Zealand dollar.



Maori Words in New Zealand English

10

However, clearly the desire to express a New Zealand identity is not the sole factor operating in the preferring of a loanword. If it were, then words such as *kotuku*, *tieke* and *piwakawaka* would be better known and more widely used in New Zealand English.

Closely related to the expression of a distinct identity is the use of loanwords to express an empathy with Maoridom, its values and aspirations. This can be illustrated by considering the signal that is being sent by a speaker who uses *Aotearoa* or *Aotearoa New Zealand* rather than the standard, and official, *New Zealand*. It seems reasonable to suggest that, in light of social changes, this motivation is going to be most obviously affecting current language use, rather than that of earlier periods. Newspaper readers will no doubt have noticed that the Maori name of a thing is often mentioned in passing. In an article on native frogs, for instance, *pepeketua* was used once, as if to acknowledge that te reo Maori has a word for native frogs, but *frog/s* twelve times. While use of the Maori word was not necessary to convey the information, its presence was an acknowledgment that we have indigenous names for indigenous flora and fauna.

It is also the desire to display empathy with Maoridom that has contributed to the often-commented-upon shift in pronunciation of Maori words. Whereas once Wellingtonians might go up the coast to *Paekak* or *Paraparam*, nowadays they are far more likely to head for *Paekakariki* and *Paraparaumu*. It is not just place names that have received attention. One magazine columnist summed up the situation rather neatly:

How a Pakeha chooses to pronounce 'Maori' determines precisely where they fit on the PC scale. There are 11 possible variations, from 'may-o-ree' at one end to Kim Hill's 'mow-rrri' 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.²⁴

Another commentator managed to link shifts in pronunciation to changes in the political landscape: 'Perhaps Winston voters are not just old-fashioned racists, but are disempowered-feeling people, who now realise they liked the country the way it used to be, and are bamboozled by suddenly hearing Oamaru pronounced 'Oh – ah – ma-rrru' with rolling R's, ...'²⁵

Maori Words in New Zealand English

The fourth consideration is that a speaker may elect to employ a loanword not only to signal empathy but also to make an impact on the audience. The impact does not need to be political, however, as in the choice of *Aotearoa*; it could just as well be, for example, humorous. *Pa*, *kai* and *whare* are examples of loanwords sometimes used for their sound effect and/or associations: for instance, *Pa Wars*, an inter-tribal sports day, based on the film series *Star Wars*; *Kai Kart*, a mobile take-away food outlet, or 'pie cart'; *Te Ware Whare*, a play on the name of the big-box retail chain The Warehouse, using the Maori words for 'the' and 'house', *te* and *whare*.

There is, however, no doubt that a significant proportion of loanwords are used almost exclusively in a Maori cultural context, and that they are deliberately chosen in preference to English language alternatives. This applies, for instance, to aspects of protocol (*wero* rather than *challenge*), the features of a marae (*paepae* rather than *threshold*), and identified positions within society (*kaumatua* rather than *elder*). However, even types with strong cultural specificity can be transferred to other contexts. Thus, a ship can be named *Rangatira*, a racehorse *Waiata*. In these cases, presumably, identity is the dominant motivation in choosing the loanword. This motivation may also help to explain why Maori speakers of New Zealand English use a higher proportion of Maori words than do non-Maori speakers.

The examples used above (*wero*, *paepae*, *kaumatua*) have a high degree of cultural specificity, but cultural reference is a less restrictive concept. A prime example is the coining of *waka-jumping* to denote the act of changing political party. Parliament is not a notably Maori cultural context. However, because the party that triggered the term, New Zealand First, was, at that time, perceived to be the main Maori voice in Parliament, the hybrid expression (containing the loanword *waka*) was preferred over the equally likely, and still current, *party-hopping*.

However, even words with specific cultural reference can be widely used and accepted in non-Maori contexts in New Zealand English. Examples of such words are *kaumatua*, *hui*, *taonga*, *whanau* and the tribal prefix *Ngati*. The attraction of such words is that they allow English-speakers to economically convey an idea — in the case of *Ngati*, a community of interest. This is linked to the final factor that may affect the selection of a Maori word over an English language alternative — the precision of meaning. It is not always possible to provide a succinct one-word synonym for a loanword. Similarly, it is not always possible to



Maori Words in New Zealand English

11 provide a gloss that captures accurately the complexity of meaning for a borrowed word. This appears to be particularly the case for loans that apply to concepts. *Mana*, *kaupapa*, and *aroha* are examples of words with varied shades of meaning in New Zealand English. *Kai*, despite its surface simplicity, also illustrates this point as it can be used to mean *meal* or *food* or *feast*.

There is, then, a wide range of possible reasons why English-speakers may choose to incorporate a word of Maori origin into their speech. As a result, the Maori word presence in New Zealand English keeps evolving and growing, which could be said to have occasioned the need for a dictionary of this type. So let us now consider the contents of this book.

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

253 Normanby Road, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205, Australia

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

OXFORD is a trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

Copyright © John Macalister 2005

First published 2005

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press. Within New Zealand, exceptions are allowed in respect of any fair dealing for the purpose of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act 1994, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms of the licences issued by Copyright Licensing Limited. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside these terms and in other countries should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above.

National Library of New Zealand
Cataloguing-in-Publication data

A dictionary of Māori words in New Zealand English / edited by
John Macalister.

Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-19-558495-3

1. English language—Foreign words and phrases—Maori.
2. English language—New Zealand—Dictionaries. 3. Maori
language—Influence on English—Dictionaries.
I. Macalister, John, 1956–

427.993—dc 22

Typeset by Promptset Pty Ltd
Printed through Bookpac Production Services, Singapore