What's sexy in New Zealand sociolinguistics? [1]

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A brief review of NZ sociolinguistics 1988-98

The Sixth New Zealand Language and Society Conference was held at Victoria University of Wellington almost precisely ten years after the first, which was at the University of Otago in 1988. The intervening ten years have seen an explosion of sociolinguistic research, with contributions from sociolinguists all over New Zealand. The major areas are indicated in figure 1; I will comment briefly on just four of these areas.[2]
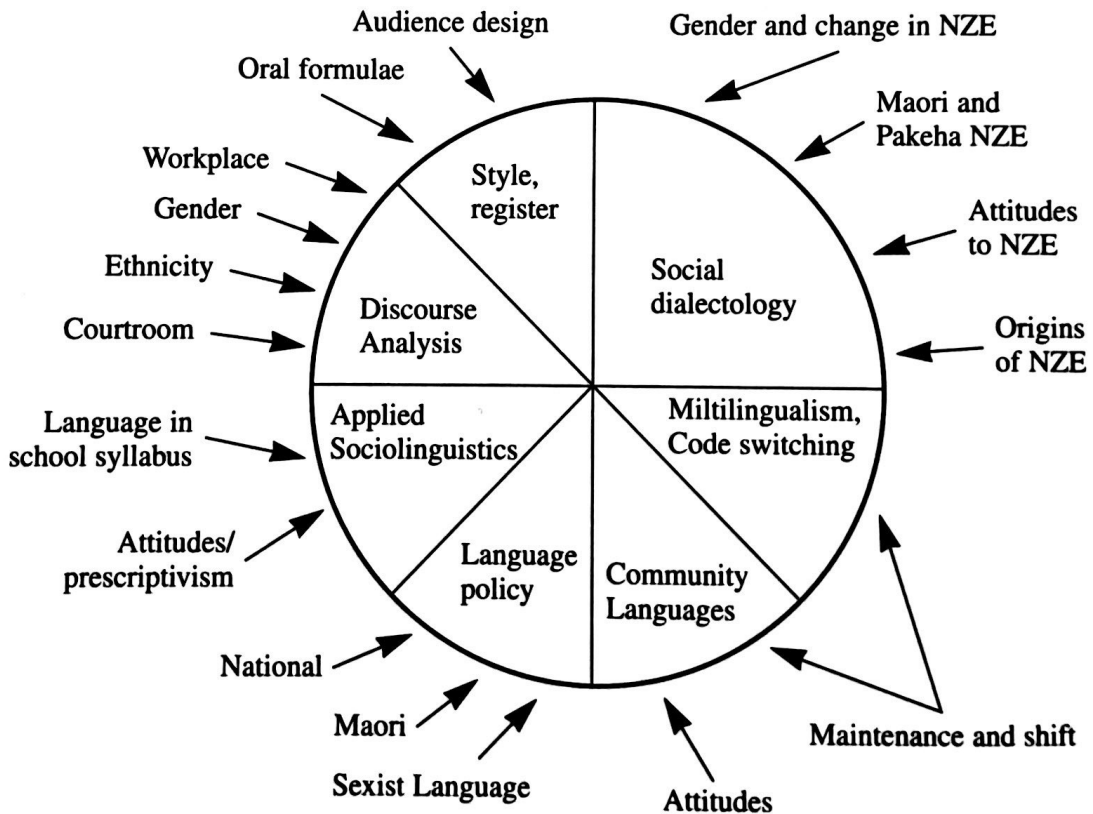

Figure 1: Sociolinguistics in New Zealand.

[2] Needless to say, sociolinguistic research is not as neatly compartmentalised as this diagram suggests.

Social dialectology – New Zealand English

Ten years ago Donn Bayard's pioneering social dialect research had only just been published (Bayard 1987), the Porirua Project, aka the Wellington Social Dialect Survey (Holmes, Bell and Boyce 1991), was a yet-to-be-funded dream, and while Elizabeth Gordon and Margaret Maclagan (1985) had begun studying the EAR/AIR merger in the speech of schoolchildren, the extensive Origins of New Zealand English Project which has developed at Canterbury University was no more than a blueprint.

Today, social dialect data is available for each of the four main centres. A great deal of information about New Zealand English (NZE) has been gathered, most within a variationist framework, on features such as the rising front vowels (eg Woods 1997), the high rising intonation contour (Britain 1992), the merging of EAR and AIR (Holmes and Bell, 1992, Batterham 1997, Gordon and Maclagan 1990), and the consonants /t/ and /r/ (Bayard 1990a, Holmes 1994, 1995a, 1995b). We know a little more about Maori English (eg. Benton 1985, 1991a, Holmes 1997a) and a good deal more about the role of women in relation to sound change in NZE than we did ten years ago (Holmes 1997b, Woods 1997, Maclagan this volume). And, thanks largely to Donn Bayard (eg 1990b, 1995) we have a great deal of information about the attitudes of New Zealanders towards NZE (as well as other varieties of English).

Language Policy – Maori

Ten years ago, Maori had just been declared an official language of Aotearoa. Richard Benton's (1978) material from the extensive NZCER Survey of the mid-1970s was the only available information on the rate of attrition of te reo Maori. Since then, interest in the condition of Maori and its place in New Zealand society has grown enormously; it has been the focus of extensive language policy discussion (eg. Benton 1991b), as well as another substantial data gathering exercise by the Maori Language Commission in conjunction with Te Pūni Kōkiri (National Maori Language Survey 1995).[3]

In 1988 the ill-fated – but in my view subterraneously influential – *Aoteareo* (Waite 1992) had not been conceived of, though there were groups working towards its conception. And although we do not yet have an explicit, comprehensive, and coherent New Zealand language policy, there has been extensive scholarly discussion, review and debate in the last ten years (eg Peddie 1992, 1993, 1995, Kaplan 1994, Shackleford 1996, Chrisp this volume). The issues encompassed now extend well beyond the place of Maori in New Zealand to considerations of which languages should be taught in NZ schools, and to what levels, what level of English proficiency

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[3] This survey puts the number of relatively fluent adult speakers of Maori at about 22,000, a very small proportion (0.6%) of the total population.

should be required of New Zealand immigrants, and in which areas interpreting and translating services should be funded by government.

Community languages
In 1988 we had scarcely any information on the language maintenance and shift patterns of the community languages of immigrant groups in New Zealand. Ten years on we have studies of Tongan ('Aipolo and Holmes 1990), Greek (Verivaki 1991), Cantonese (Roberts 1991), Fiji-Hindi (Shameem 1995), Gujarati, Samoan, and Dutch speakers in Wellington (Roberts forthcoming), of Korean, Dutch and Samoan speakers in Dunedin (Johri 1998), German speakers in Palmerston North (Walker 1995), and Chinese dialects and Korean in Auckland (eg Starks and Ho Youn 1998), with work on Japanese and Cook Island Maori in progress. Indeed the field has expanded so fast that this list is inevitably incomplete.

Style and register
Allan Bell published his programmatic paper on style in 1984, but ten years ago the programme had yet to be established. In the last ten years, Bell has considerably extended his research in this area (Bell 1998). Similarly, our appreciation of the pervasiveness of oral formulae and their ideological underpinnings has been considerably expanded by Kon Kuiper's research (1996) which began with auctioneering (Kuiper and Haggo 1984) and racing commentary (Kuiper and Austin 1990), and, with the latest contribution entitled "pumping" (Kuiper and Hodge 1998), shows no sign of decreasing in energy.

NZ sociolinguists can fairly claim to have had an extensive influence on language research in New Zealand over the last ten years. Certainly no area of NZ descriptive linguistics has remained untouched by sociolinguistics: the Wellington Corpora of New Zealand English (1998) are imbued with sociolinguistic principles, and there is evidence of sensitivity to sociolinguistic considerations in a number of recent New Zealand dictionaries including the *Oxford Dictionary of NZE* (Orsman 1997) and the *Dictionary of New Zealand Sign Language* (1997).

New Zealand sociolinguistics has also had an increasing impact internationally in the last ten years. While Richard Benton's work in language policy has long been internationally respected, in 1998 the sociolinguistic world is considerably more aware of the characteristics of New Zealand English than it was ten years ago. New Zealand sociolinguistic research has appeared in a wide range of leading international journals in the last ten years (as the references at the end of this paper indicate).

Methodology and New Zealand sociolinguistics
I have skimmed the surface of what has been accomplished in New Zealand in the last ten years – and inevitably failed to do justice to the full extent of the achievement of New Zealand sociolinguists – because I also want to discuss an issue which I consider a currently "hot" or "sexy" issue in NZ

sociolinguistics – namely the influence of social constructionist theory on sociolinguistic methodology.

In much recent sociolinguistic research, there is evidence of a reaction to the predominantly quantitative approaches which have been associated with a "fixed-structures model of society" (Coupland 1998: 115), as evident in the work of variationists like Labov. Instead, a view of language as social action is becoming the dominant theoretical model, and along with this we find impassioned advocacy of ethnographic, qualitative methodologies. Social constructionism has swept through language and gender research, for example, leaving social dialectologists gasping for air. So, we may reasonably ask "what is the appropriate nature of the link between social structural theories or positivist paradigms, and the survey approaches and quantitative methodologies which tend to be associated with them on the one hand, and social action models and the more ethnographic and qualitative methodologies with which they tend to be linked on the other?" This is a complicated issue and I cannot cover all aspects of it in this paper. Nor is the problem a new one, but it has taken on new dimensions as social constructionism has impacted on sociolinguistics, and in particular on research in areas such as language and gender, language and ethnicity, and language and power (eg Bergvall et al. 1996, Johnson and Meinhof 1996).

As a theoretical framework, social constructionism offers a much more dynamic and interactional approach than the essentialist models which it is rapidly displacing. And while there is no necessary relationship between social constructionism and ethnographic qualitative methodologies, the reality is that the two have become inextricably entwined. Social construct-ionaism encourages rich description which informs interpretation; research within this theoretical framework is typically characterised by ethno-graphically grounded, qualitative analysis of specific, selected excerpts of language. So, instead of describing features of the way women and men speak – eg establishing that women use fewer instances of vernacular forms such as *-in* than men, or that women disruptively interrupt less often than men, a social constructionist approach tends to examine how a person constructs their gender identity in a specific on-going interaction. Such an approach lends itself, for instance, to an examination of the kind of gender identity Helen is constructing for herself and her daughter in the following conversation with a rather conservative middle class friend. (See Appendix for transcription conventions.)

EXAMPLE 1
Context: Two middle class, middle-aged Pakeha friends drinking tea in H's kitchen

H. we went and swam at the pool
   Andrea did SEVEN lengths
J. goodness me
H. with little breaks in between

but she's never swum a length of that pool before
/and she just suddenly discovered\
J. /(that's so good)\
H. she could swim a length [laughs]
and got so keen she didn't want to stop
she said I'll just do another one
and then /I'll do another one so that\
J. /that's terrific\
H. was (fun so) she looked like a [laughs] s-
Liz was there with her friend John
and he said /she\ looked like a goldfish you [laughs]
J. /mm\
H. /know s- (there's) a little head ( )\
J. /[laughs]\ (he'd find out when we-) yeah
H. a- a (rolling) in the water
J. /[laughs] oh\
H. [laughs] and legs sort of sagging in the water o- and breaststroking away
J. /good on her\
H. /you know\ but she was obviously really sort of getting a kick out of the achievements
J. that's so good

In this excerpt, Helen constructs the identity of her youngest daughter Andrea as a sweet, endearing little girl by her use of a range of linguistic devices, including the effective use of diminutives and attenuators such as *quite (sweet)*, *just* and *little*, the pragmatic particles *sort of* and *you know*, the adverb particle *away* in the phrase *breast-stroking away*, and the repetition of phrases and syntactic patterns (*I'll just do another one and then I'll do another one*). These components cumulatively contribute to Helen's affectionate picture of her sweet little daughter swimming gamely away, as does the paralinguistic laughter, and the attribution to an observer of a comment that emphasises how cute and amusing Andrea's behaviour is.

Helen constructs herself as a "good mother" looking after her little girl by taking her swimming, encouraging her efforts with admiration, and taking pleasure in her achievement. But Helen's gender is also expressed through her use of specific phonological variants which are more frequent in New Zealand women's speech than men's. To give just two examples, Helen consistently uses the standard variant of (ING) throughout this excerpt (eg. *rolling, sagging, breaststroking, getting*), and she uses a conservative aspirated variant of intervocalic /t/ at a level of 45% in the extract, almost exactly the level typical for middle-aged middle class New Zealand women (Holmes 1994). Moreover, her use of pragmatic particles and attenuators such as *you know, sort of, quite*, and *just* also contribute to the construction of a somewhat conservative, feminine gendered identity. In other words, many different levels of Helen's discourse contribute to the construction of a rather conservative gender identity in this excerpt – her phonological

choices, her lexical selections and her use of pragmatic devices, as well as the topic and structure of the narrative she has chosen to recount on this occasion.[4] A social constructionist approach thus focusses on the detail of the linguistic, pragmatic and discourse features of a particular interaction in a specific context to demonstrate the fact that "doing gender" or "doing power" is an on-going dynamic process.

This example provides, then, an initial illustration of my contention that it is important to make use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in sociolinguistic research. Illuminating Helen's gender identity construction involves going beyond discourse analysis. The individual features of Helen's speech acquire social significance in the light of the groundwork established by previous social dialect analysis. Isolated features are meaningless – it is the overall configuration of features or the constellation of structures which is important.

I first encountered the problem of the proper relationship between quantitative and qualitative analysis in the early 1980's in the form of the question of how to assess the social significance of different frequencies of occurrence of pragmatic particles such as *you know*, *eh*, and *sort of* (Holmes 1986, 1989). Even leaving aside the issue of the range of pragmatic meanings of these particles, there was the major problem of the appropriate "universe of discourse" or "envelope of variation" for measuring the significance of their frequency of occurrence. How do you evaluate the significance of 200 instances of *you know* in the speech of a group of women, for instance, compared to 150 instances in the speech of a group of men? The answer from traditional social dialectology was that you assessed how many instances occurred in relation to how many COULD have occurred. This works pretty well with instances of initial [h] in words like *hope* and *happy*, or initial unaspirated [t] in Maori English pronunciations of *Taihape*, or *television*, where we can largely agree on how many instances could have occurred. But it is not so easy to determine for pragmatic particles such as *like* or *sort of*. It is astonishing how many instances of such particles a speaker can cram into one utterance. The following example is from a corpus I analysed in the 1980s (Holmes 1989).

EXAMPLE 2
Context: Young man explaining vision problem to his wife

> and literally <u>sort of</u> quite out of phase and *sort of* doing things and eventually *sort of* ends up circling two *sort of* skips down the page

The solution I adopted was to relate the number of instances of a pragmatic

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[4] In other contexts, Helen presents a very different and more radical gender identity. This excerpt is taken from a longer narrative which is discussed more fully in Holmes (1997c).

particle to the total number of words produced by a speaker, and this has proved a reasonably robust strategy. It has subsequently been used to develop indices which allow comparison of the frequency of use of a range of discourse features, including levels of feedback, pauses and disruptive interruptions (Stubbe 1991), as well as the relative frequency of pragmatic particles such as *eh* (Meyerhoff 1994).

A recent analysis of pragmatic devices by Maria Stubbe (in press) in a matched sample of Maori and Pakeha interactions from the WCSNZE, showed Maori speakers using a much higher proportion of addressee-oriented devices such as *eh* and *you know*, with a combined index score of 89 compared to 41 for the Pakeha speakers. By devising an appropriate index it was possible to show that *eh* was used nine times more frequently by Maori speakers than by Pakeha in conversation, and *you know* two and a half times more often. Similarly, examining pauses and verbal feedback in the speech of a small sample of Maori and Pakeha conversations from the Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English (WCSNZE), Stubbe (1998) established that the Maori listeners produced about a third less verbal feedback than did their Pakeha counterparts. In other words, once a valid and reliable method of quantification has been devised for a particular feature, it is possible to use it to establish group norms. And in my view this is an essential background for any interpretive, qualitative analysis.

Reliable, interpretive research often depends crucially on preliminary quantitative research to establish the general patterns which provide the interpretive framework.[5] The precise social meaning of many features, including interactive features such as feedback, pauses and interruptions, varies from one socio-cultural group to another. Group norms need to be established to provide an analytical framework, so that it is possible to explain how a particular use achieves its effect. So having established overall verbal feedback patterns for Maori and Pakeha in her sample, Stubbe (1998) went on to examine how these norms were realised at the level of individual interactions. This research illustrated clearly the ways in which an informed detailed qualitative analysis of particular interactions acquires depth and substance from the groundwork established by preceding quantitative analysis.

Similarly, Allan Bell is currently exploring the relationship between figure and ground within his audience design framework, examining in particular the ways in which Maori interviewees exploit features of Maori English to affirm and assert their ethnic identity (Bell and Johnson 1997). In this analysis they demonstrate that

Individual speakers use style – and other aspects of their language

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[5] In fact, the process is recursive, since satisfactory quantification depends on prior qualitative coding of the data.

repertoire – to represent their identity or to lay claim to other identities (Bell 1998: 17).

The patterns Meyerhoff (1994) established for the distribution of *eh* in the interviews in the Porirua data recur in the interviews in Bell's audience design study. So, on the basis of a detailed qualitative analysis of three interviews involving Duncan, a Maori male interviewee (one with a Maori male, one with a Maori woman, and one with a Pakeha male interviewer) Bell and Johnson (1997) report that Duncan produced *eh* significantly more often when interacting with the Maori male interviewer; and that further his use of eh tended to cluster most heavily during discussion of Maori topics, often co-occurring with the use of Maori lexical items. Duncan uses eh in ways which express his identity, both as Maori and as male. Or, in social constructionist terms, Duncan's use of *eh* is one component in the construction of his Maori and his male identity, both of which are especially salient in this particular interaction. The detailed stylistic analysis draws on earlier social dialect research which established the norms against which any particular individual's "performance" can be evaluated and interpreted.[6] These examples illustrate one of the particular strengths of New Zealand sociolinguistics, namely, the ways in which quantitative and qualitative approaches have been successfully and productively integrated.

Over the last ten years, as mentioned above, some researchers have rejected quantitative approaches, adopting instead the qualitative methodology associated with social constructionism. It is perhaps not surprising that gender studies rebelled against what were considered the unilluminating quantitative approaches of the 1980s, approaches dominated by statistics, and approaches which often provided little in the way of explanation and interpretation. Social dialect surveys, for instance, rarely engaged in detailed contextual analysis of particular interactions. Language use surveys were more concerned with documenting who used what language to whom and when, than with analysing "why", a question to which the answer was often regarded as self-evident. Consequently, the complexity of an individual's social identity (concurrently woman, mother, daughter, manager, Greek New Zealander, Wellingtonian, for instance) was often greatly over-simplified.

But in my view, the reaction is in danger of going too far – at this point it is rather quantitative methods that are in danger of neglect (Holmes 1998a). There is a proliferation of studies which take to pieces a small section of text such as the analysis of example 1 above. Such analyses are

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[6] Bell makes a similar point in relation to his work on style: "the main challenge for any theory of style, is to take account of the dynamic, initiative use of style by individual speakers to express aspects of their identity, while retaining a worthwhile level of generalization" (1998: 17).

vulnerable to criticisms such as those articulated by Stubbs (1997) and Fowler (1996):

[D]emonstrations [tend] to be fragmentary, exemplificatory, and they usually take too much for granted in the way of method and context ......[N]owadays it seems that anything can count as discourse analysis ...[t]here is a danger [of] competing and uncontrolled methodologies drawn from a scatter of different models in the social sciences (Fowler 1996, 8,12).

While such analyses are almost always illuminating and interesting, one needs to ask questions such as 'how typical is this bit of text?', and 'can the usages and strategies identified in it be considered representative of a genre (or activity type or sequence type)?'

I have suggested that some of the most interesting current work in New Zealand sociolinguistics can provide answers to such questions because it examines both figure and ground; it provides the larger picture as well as the fine qualitative analysis; it identifies the ways in which sociolinguistic patterns are made up from the accumulation of individual interactions. So Bell can assert the significance of the use of a close variant of the PIT vowel by a Maori male interviewee because of the patterns established by his global analysis of this vowel in the Porirua data (Bell 1997). I was able to interpret the social significance of the variants of intervocalic /t/ in the narrative of a middle class Pakeha woman in the light of previous analysis of a large sample analysed from the WSCNZE (Holmes 1994). Similarly occurrences of pragmatic particles such as *eh* and *you know* in particular interactions, and variations in the amount of verbal feedback, can be reliably interpreted because the more global quantitative analysis has been undertaken. Specific examples which stand out may do so precisely because they are atypical. Preceding quantitative analysis enables us to be confident of the proper status of examples selected and analysed as paradigmatic, or alternatively as significant because unusual.

But can this argument be extended to features of discourse which are less amenable to quantification? I will consider an example from our recent work examining spontaneous narrative and humour, using a sample of 50 conversationalists from the WCSNZE. In the following example, a young Maori man, Rewi, entertains his companion, Peter, by describing his attempts to learn how to make bread from his grandmother who is familiar with the old traditional baking methods. The contributions attributed to the grandmother are italicised.

EXAMPLE 3

Context: Two young Maori male friends in the home of one of them

Rewi: though I was thinking of doing a rēwana [Maori bread] at some stage

Peter: choice can you do that can you cook (on them) ......

Rewi: well it's like I tried learning off the old um my grandmother

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and she was saying like
I thought how how much do you
how do you leave it in
how long do you leave it in the fridge for

Peter: yeah [laughs]
Rewi: *oh till you need (knead ?) it*
Peter [laughs]
Rewi: and how long's that
I don't know
how long are you going to need (knead ?) it next
Peter: yeah
Rewi: and I said well who knows
two weeks can you leave it
oh I suppose so
Peter: [laughs]
Rewi: couldn't get any answers out of her like you know
Peter: [laughs] yeah
Rewi: how do you make it-
she goes *oh well you get a bit of flour*
you put it in you put a bit of
you put a bit of sugar in
and then you put a bit of water in
how much?
oh as much as you need
Peter: [laughs] yeah [laughs]
Rewi: sorry Nana I sort of
I don't understand those sort of instructions
Peter: yeah
Rewi: Mum got hoohaa [cross] with me
cause she said I was too impatient
Peter: [tut] to learn?
Rewi: n- yeah yeah I wanted er
I wanted the rēwana now
I couldn't [laughs] wait for few whatever hours she kept in the hot
water cupboard
Peter: oh yeah to rise
Rewi: yeah yeah to rise
Peter: oh man [tut]

This excerpt is the core of Rewi's long story, and it is one of 96 narratives analysed from the WCSNZE sample (Holmes 1998b). Like many other stories in the sample, this narrative illustrates the gap developing between Maori generations in terms of traditional knowledge, and the different experiences of old and young which are creating and reinforcing this gap. It also suggests the old Maori woman's resistance to verbalising and making explicit knowledge and behaviour that in her experience are best learned by

traditional Maori teaching methods – by example, by doing alongside another, and by observation over time (eg Metge 1995).

Most interesting, however, are thematic and structural features which the analysis of the larger sample suggest may be particularly distinctive of Maori narratives. The story focuses on an important kin relationship, grandparent-grandchild; Rewi seeks traditional knowledge from his grandmother, an indication of respect for her greater experience. But in telling the story he presents two rather unheroic protagonists, constructing an amusing caricature of a dialogue between himself and his grandmother in order to entertain his friend. He constructs himself as an impatient city boy, demanding explicitness, logic and precision in the description of how to make bread, characteristics more usually associated with Pakeha than Maori discourse. He caricatures his grandmother as a vague, traditional cook relying on years of experience rather than scales and clocks. But although the characters are satirised, they are depicted with sympathy. Rewi's use of direct speech rather than reported speech, for example, provides his grandmother with a sweet, vague personality (also conveyed through the gentle tone he uses for his grandmother's part in the dialogue). These features – a humorous presentation of a personal experience featuring unheroic and comical characters – recur in a number of the Maori men's stories.

This story is then a good example in that it illustrates a typical feature of the Maori men's stories in the sample analysed. Many constitute amusing tales which end in catastrophe with the narrator as anti-hero or victim. These narratives often, implicitly or explicitly, compared rural Maori ways of doing things with ways associated with sophisticated urban, mainly Pakeha, lifestyles. The stories often involved complex levels of irony leaving a great deal understated; they frequently ridiculed "proper" behaviour. In another story, for instance, the narrator caricatures himself as a country bumpkin come to town, out of his depth in a sophisticated commercial context, but at the same time he makes fun of the ways in which Pakeha business meetings are run, and debunks the jargon used in large corporate organisations.

In terms of structure, I will mention just one feature. This story again illustrates a feature which occurred in a number of Maori stories, but was rarer in Pakeha narratives. The story has much less overt lexical scaffolding in the form of signals of speakerhood, such as "she said" and "I said" than one might expect. The listener is expected to follow the story with relatively few explicit lexical signals; some of the 'missing' information is conveyed by the intonation and prosody, but there remains a considerable amount of work to be done by the listener to follow who is saying what. Yet Peter gives no indication that he has any trouble following the story. Indeed he follows it with a story of his own which makes a related point about Maori ways of doing things. This feature also recurs in other Maori stories: meanings are not always made explicit, but the listener is expected to infer them from the context.

The humour of this story can be related to a larger scale analysis of

the functions of humour using a sample of 260 instances of humour from the interactions of 40 young New Zealanders (Holmes and Hay 1997). The story illustrates well the type of humour found in many of the Maori conversations in this sample. Firstly, it revolves around ethnic identity. Ethnic identity was often the focus of Maori humour, and this was especially apparent in the Maori men's stories.[7] Secondly, a closely related point, the humour functions to express and maintain solidarity between the two young men – it relies on and expresses shared attitudes and values. Thirdly, the humour strategy adopted is wry self-deprecation. All these features were typical of the Maori instances of humour in our sample.

So quantification enables us to make generalisations more confidently and to support the claim that the particular excerpts selected for detailed analysis are representative and typical of those found in the larger sample. On the other hand, qualitative analysis is also crucial. Detailed analyses of the structure of narratives, and of the kinds of ethnic and gender identities which are being constructed as people tell stories form the crucial underpinning for interpreting the significance of the quantitative data. Quantification is important because as sociolinguists, we want to be able to identify patterns which characterise the behaviour of particular social groups; and detailed, qualitative, ethnographically rich analysis of instances in their social context is also important, because we want to be able to explain the social and cultural significance of the features identified.

Conclusion

One of the defining characteristics of sociolinguistics as opposed to formal linguistics, or pragmatics, or discourse analysis, must be that sociolinguists are interested in how language behaviour characterises and distinguishes social groups in a community. ("Social" here includes, of course, groups distinguished by occupation, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, education and so on.) Hence, sociolinguists, and especially those working at the level of discourse, need to consider how they can guarantee their data is representative or typical of the group whose language they are studying. On the other hand, convincing explanation and interpretation needs to be grounded in the detail of ethnographic qualitative analysis.

In my view it is this integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis which is the strength of sociolinguistics in New Zealand. We have made a virtue of necessity. Because there are so few of us we have been forced to cover large areas of sociolinguistic research between us: thus

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[7] Similarly, Maori stories frequently reflected the narrators' awareness of Pakeha norms, and their consciousness of the differences between Maori and Pakeha ways of doing things that was simply not a feature of Pakeha stories. So ethnic identity was an ever-present, always salient dimension for Maori narrators, but not for Pakeha.

specialisation at the micro-level or macro-level of analysis is rare. Moreover, because we are a small community of researchers, we have often worked together: thus the boundaries between pragmatics, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistics have been very permeable in New Zealand. And, finally, access to insights from other disciplines, and interdisciplinary research itself, has been easier in a country where psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and linguists meet regularly in university common rooms, as well as at seminars.

So in many areas, New Zealand sociolinguistic research has benefited from a fruitful marrying of ethnographic and quantitative approaches. Social dialect data identifies the patterns which enable us to accurately interpret the social significance of the use of particular sociolinguistic variants in particular contexts. The quantification of the discourse features of narrative and humour provide a similar basis for interpretive analysis and the search for explanations. It is counter-productive to denigrate one type of analysis in order to promote another. We should continue to analyse sociolinguistic behaviour both at the micro-level and the macro-level and to relate the two levels of analysis. This has always been a strength of New Zealand sociolinguistics and long may it continue to be so.

Appendix
Transcription conventions

All names are pseudonyms.

YES	Capitals indicate emphatic stress
[laughs]	Paralinguistic features in square brackets
[drawls]	
+	Pause of up to one second
(4)	Indicates length of pause in seconds
..../......\...	Simultaneous speech
..../......\...	
(hello)	Transcriber's best guess at an unclear utterance
?	Rising or question intonation
son-	Incomplete or cut-off utterance

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