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*A world of light, or hurt? Māori metaphors in response to non-Māori use of te reo Māori*

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*A world of light, or hurt?*  
*Māori metaphors in response to non-Māori use of te reo Māori*

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## **Abstract**

Pākehā popstar Lorde’s 2021 launch of *Te Ao Mārama*, a mini album of songs in te reo Māori, triggered a debate among Māori online. Some argued the album made te reo more accessible, while others saw it as a hurtful reminder of the language’s inaccessibility to many Māori. This article examines Māori attitudes about language revitalisation expressed in ten opinion pieces and one media article responding to this media event. Specifically, we explore what the metaphors used by Māori commentators can tell us about contemporary Māori attitudes towards the revitalisation of te reo Māori. Our analysis highlights that, for many Māori, engaging in learning te reo Māori requires engaging with a world of hurt. We encourage researchers, language planners and teachers to take trauma into account in Māori language revitalisation initiatives and identify an urgent need for non-Māori to reflect on their positionality within Māori language learning, policy, and research.

## **Keywords**

Te reo Māori, language attitudes, language revitalisation, metaphor

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## **1 Introduction**

Attitudes toward a minoritised language is one focus within the field of language attitudes research (Garrett et al. 2003). In the 1990s and 2000s, a body of sociolinguistic research formed in Aotearoa on attitudes towards te reo Māori among Māori and non-Māori<sup>1</sup> New Zealanders (Nicholson & Garland 1991; Lane 2003; Boyce 2005; de Bres 2008a; 2009; Keegan et al. 2010; Te Puni Kōkiri 2002; 2003; 2006; 2010). This research found that the attitudes of Māori were more positive than those of non-Māori, as might be expected in a context of colonisation (de

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term ‘Pākehā’ to reference European-origin New Zealanders and the more expansive ‘non-Māori’ wherever relevant.

Bres 2011). Regarding non-Māori, the focus at this time was on the extent to which the negative attitudes of non-Māori towards te reo Māori might pose a barrier to Māori language revitalisation, and how such attitudes might be shifted in favour of te reo Māori. The importance of such studies has been highlighted by sociolinguists such as de Bres (2008a) and May (2000):

The issue of majority opinion remains a crucial one for minority language policy initiatives. In effect, the long-term success of such initiatives may only be achieved (or be achievable) if at least some degree of favourable majority opinion is secured. (May 2000: 371)

Academic and government research at this time did not presume that non-Māori would necessarily learn to speak te reo Māori themselves, but that they might engage in a range of behaviours to foster a positive environment for Māori use of te reo Māori (de Bres 2009). Since this time, studies have expanded to investigate what motivates non-Māori to learn te reo Māori, reflecting a positive attitudinal shift among non-Māori (Thompson-Teepa 2008; Myhre 2015; Berardi-Wiltshire 2020; Flavell 2020; O’Toole 2021). There has been little attention, however, to how this trend is perceived by Māori.<sup>2</sup> Paradoxically, the increasingly positive attitudes of non-Māori toward te reo Māori bring new concerns, as non-Māori interest in learning te reo Māori does not necessarily benefit Māori. Anecdotally, Māori are experiencing trauma when learning te reo Māori alongside non-Māori, or when non-Māori are learning the language in their place (Hayden 2021a; Jones 2021; McKibbin 2021; Gildea 2022). The lack of research on Māori perspectives on this topic represents a worrisome gap in language attitudes research in Aotearoa (New Zealand) and one that we seek to address in this article.

The dominant methodological approach in language attitudes studies in Aotearoa has been to use questionnaires and/or highly structured interviews, using items such as attitude statements and attitude-rating scales (Nicholson & Garland 1991; Te Puni Kōkiri 2002, 2003, 2006, 2010; de Bres 2009; Keegan et al. 2010). These studies have contributed to our understanding of broad patterns in attitudes towards te reo Māori (de Bres 2011), but one area they fail to address is the emotional elements of people’s relationships to language use. This reflects the dominance of “direct methods” in language attitudes research, which focus attention on explicit, conscious aspects of attitudes, rather than more implicit, unconscious aspects (Garrett 2010). This leaves a research gap, as emotions play an essential role in language shift and revitalisation (Walsh 2019) and are a key component of language attitudes more generally (Garrett et al. 2003).

One way to explore the emotional character of people’s relationships to language is to take a more discursive approach, looking at the ways people describe their language attitudes in less directed and structured ways. When based on existing data in the public domain, as is the case in the present study, this has been described as the “societal treatment approach” to language attitudes research (Garrett et al. 2003). Another way is to attend to the more lyrical and creative elements of language, such as metaphor, which people often use to convey emotion (Katz & Ortony 1987).

In this article, we approach the question of Māori attitudes and emotions about language revitalisation through the analysis of metaphor, asking: what can the metaphors used by Māori commentators tell us about contemporary Māori attitudes towards the revitalisation of te reo Māori?

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<sup>2</sup> An exception is Ngaha (2011), who uses survey, narrative, hui and interview data to analyse Māori views towards non-Māori using te reo, many of which recur in our analysis.

## 2 Kaupapa Māori theoretical framework

Kaupapa Māori theory stems from a body of knowledge that has epistemological and metaphysical roots, which are said to date back to the creation of the universe (Nepe 1991). Kaupapa Māori is thus an ancient rather than a new phenomenon, embedded in te ao Māori. Since the point of first contact with Pākehā, however, this world view has been supplanted with Western ideals, and Māori have fought urgently against this reality to prevent further loss of culture. One iteration of Kaupapa Māori, then, has been to establish Indigenous space in the Western-dominated academy, challenging the underlying assumptions of Western orthodoxies (Hoskins & Jones 2017). Kaupapa Māori acknowledges and accommodates Māori ways of being with an approach that remains academically rigorous (Irwin 1994).

Following the preschool and primary educational initiatives of kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa Māori of the 1980s, Smith (1997) outlines a set of key theoretical tenets of Kaupapa Māori, including that the validity and legitimacy of Māori are taken for granted; the survival and revival of Māori language and culture is imperative; and the struggle for autonomy over their own cultural wellbeing and over their own lives is vital to Māori. These fundamental principles continue to be refined by Kaupapa Māori theorists, with the overarching maxim that Kaupapa Māori research should be conducted by, with, and for Māori (Tuiwai Smith 2015).

Kaupapa Māori is intimately connected to mātauranga Māori. While mātauranga Māori is based upon traditional Māori knowledge, Kaupapa Māori reflects the values of traditional knowledge in the development of new knowledge (Mikahere-Hall 2017). In other words, mātauranga Māori is a way of understanding things and Kaupapa Māori is a way of doing things (Durie 2017).

Pertinent to our study is the principle of tino rangatiratanga, which relates to notions of self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy and self-governance. Pihama (2001) claims tino rangatiratanga is a key tenet of a Kaupapa Māori theoretical analysis, as it contextualises Māori within Aotearoa, via Article 2 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, because te reo Māori is affirmed within Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a taonga,<sup>4</sup> the Crown has an obligation to support the maintenance and development of te reo Māori. In line with this concept, a Kaupapa Māori approach to our analysis gives primacy to tangata whenua perspectives regarding how non-Māori – tangata Tiriti – support the project of revitalising te reo Māori. This involves centering Māori aspirations for te reo Māori, including the refreshing of expectations for non-Māori in the current environment.

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<sup>3</sup> Te Tiriti o Waitangi, an agreement signed in 1840 by representatives of Māori and the British Crown, resulted in the declaration of British sovereignty over New Zealand. There were two versions of the agreement, one in Māori and one in English, and they differed in meaning. Māori and Pākehā had different expectations of the terms of the agreement, and this, along with its dishonest implementation, has caused intergenerational harm to Māori. Article 2 of the treaty, translated from te reo Māori into English, states that: “The Queen of England agrees to protect the chiefs, the subtribes and all the people of New Zealand in the unqualified exercise of their chieftainship over their lands, villages and all their treasures” (New Zealand Government n.d.), thus providing for tino rangatiratanga.

<sup>4</sup> The Waitangi Tribunal, on the guidance of a submission by Professor Hirini Moko Mead, interprets the phrase “O ratou taonga katoa” in Article 2 of Te Tiriti of Waitangi as referring to “both tangible and intangible things”, translated as the expression “all their valued customs and possessions” (Waitangi Tribunal 1986: 20). The following statement is made:

4.2.4 When the question for decision is whether te reo Maori is a “taonga” which the Crown is obliged to recognise we conclude that there can be only one answer. It is plain that the language is an essential part of the culture and must be regarded as “a valued possession”. (Waitangi Tribunal 1986: 20)

### 3 Kupu whakarite/metaphor

In te reo Māori, the term “kupu whakarite” can be used to encompass various kinds of figurative language, including similes and metaphors (Black 2021: 9). Following Black (2021), in this article, we use the English term “metaphor” in this broad sense to refer to all forms of figurative language, including similes, metaphors, idioms and proverbs.

Lakoff & Johnson (1980: 133) posit that metaphors “are among our principal vehicles for understanding [and] play a central role in the construction of social and political reality”. Alongside such cognitive and discursive functions of metaphor, metaphors are well known for their uses in vividly describing emotional states, permitting “the expression of that which is difficult to express using literal language alone” (Katz & Ortony 1987: 239).

For Māori, metaphorical language also holds cultural significance in transmitting ancestral knowledge, via whakataukī (proverbs, adages), kīwaha (sayings), karakia (prayers, incantations), pūrakau (stories) and waiata (songs), traditionally used in speeches, narratives and other contexts. Kupu whakarite in te reo Māori often relate to the natural world, with a recent collection including instances pertaining to birds, trees and the forest, the ocean, parts of a canoe, parts of the body, animals and insects (Black 2021). This metaphorical language associated with te reo Māori is also apparent when Māori speak and write in English, using metaphors relating to the natural environment as “powerful emotional symbols” that may be misunderstood by those unfamiliar with Māori culture (Benton 1985: 116, cited in Holmes 2005).

King (2007) illustrates how metaphors provide a significant source of insight into Māori beliefs and motivations about learning the language, through a study involving newly fluent te reo Māori learners, in which metaphors transmit highly subjective and affective information. Across 32 interviews with participants, four metaphors were the most frequent. These were LANGUAGE IS A PATH, CANOE, PLANT, and FOOD. Some of these metaphors are related to overarching metaphors of journey and growth. King traces the origins of these metaphors via various Māori sources from the 19th century through to the time of writing. Our research expands this focus beyond Māori attitudes towards language learning to the question of Māori attitudes towards the revitalisation of te reo Māori more broadly.

The analytical approach we take to metaphors acknowledges the relationship between mātauranga Māori and te reo Māori. Pihama et al. (2019: 1) claim that:

Despite the ongoing impact of colonisation in Aotearoa many traditional knowledge repositories have survived to support present and future generations. Whakataukī is one example of the incredible knowledge that is encrypted within mātauranga and te reo Māori.

Contemporary Māori cultural concepts and associated health initiatives have been developed through metaphor, such as Te Whare Tapa Whā, Te Pā Harakeke, and Te Pae Māhutonga.<sup>5</sup> These metaphors make sense to Māori and contribute to developing authentic ways of thinking and addressing issues Māori face (Mahuika 2008: 9). In this article, we shine a light on Māori use of metaphorical language as a means of formulating new knowledge on a topic that has direct relevance and importance to Māori – language revitalisation.

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<sup>5</sup> These are three examples of Māori cultural frameworks referring to health and wellbeing, expressed through metaphors of HEALTH AND WELLBEING IS A WHARENUI (Te Whare Tapa Whā), A HARAKEKE PLANT (Te Pā Harakeke) and THE CONSTELLATION OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS (Te Pae Māhutonga) respectively.

## 4 Data and method

The data we use arose from a media event in 2021, in which New Zealand popstar Lorde (Ella Yelich-O'Connor) launched *Te Ao Mārama*, a mini album of five songs delivered in te reo Māori, on the eve of Te Wiki o te Reo Māori. Lorde had expressed interest in recording a selection of songs from her album *Solar Power* in te reo Māori and was supported through this process by leading experts in te reo Māori, including Hinewehi Mohi, Tīmoti Kāretu, and Hēmi Kelly. The launch of the album, which had been kept secret, triggered a language ideological debate (Blommaert 1999) among Māori online. Some argued that the release foregrounded te reo Māori, making the language more relevant and accessible, given Lorde's celebrity platform. Others argued that the Pākehā popstar's privileged access to te reo Māori served as a hurtful reminder of its inaccessibility to many Māori, questioning whom the album benefited.

For our analysis, we collected opinion pieces published online on news media websites, online magazines and blogs. The criteria for inclusion were that they responded to the release of *Te Ao Mārama* (or referenced the album in the context of writing about Te Wiki o te Reo Māori 2021) and that they were authored by Māori. This resulted in ten opinion pieces, with the addition of a longer article. The longer article (Hayden 2021) appeared on the news media website *The Spinoff* to announce the launch of the album. It is a long-form piece that provides context for the album and includes quotes from several people involved in creating it. We included it as, like the ten opinion pieces, it is written from the perspective of a Māori author, whose point of view comes through clearly throughout the piece.

In analysing the data, we first identified all the metaphors relating to te reo Māori that appeared in the opinion pieces. Next, we analysed the semantic content of the metaphors. The first step was to identify what two concepts were being linked – the literal and the figurative – based on the context of the surrounding text. In the case of the traditional kupu whakarite of a tohetaka (dandelion), for instance, the two concepts are the flower (literal meaning) and the person who is a late riser (figurative meaning). The second step was to identify the point of the analogy. In this case, the metaphor transfers the associations of the tohetaka, which only opens its petals when the day is well advanced, to the person who is slow to get up. Having analysed the metaphors in this way, we then interpreted their meaning in light of the sociolinguistic context of language revitalisation in Aotearoa.

## 5 Analysis

Metaphors are present in all the opinion pieces, where the authors use figures of speech to support their arguments. Six semantic categories of metaphors recur, each distilling a distinct attitudinal and emotional response to *Te Ao Mārama*. We focus on these recurrent metaphors below. They are: metaphors of LIGHT representing prospects for te reo Māori, metaphors of TREASURE and GIFT representing language ownership, metaphors of BODILY SENSATIONS representing experiences of language trauma, metaphors of WAR representing linguistic violence and resistance, metaphors of FOOD representing language acquisition, and metaphors of PLATFORM and STAGE representing access to an audience. We discuss these in turn below.

### 5.1 *Metaphors of light – LANGUAGE REVITALISATION IS LIGHT*

The first category comprises metaphors of LIGHT, representing prospects for te reo Māori. These metaphors appear in two opinion pieces. The Māori title of *Solar Power – Te Ao Mārama* – translates to “world of light” in English. This title is based on the saying *mai te pō ki te ao mārama*, which one author describes as follows:

The transition from night to the **enlightened**<sup>6</sup> world that comprises part of the Māori creation narrative (similar to Adam and Eve’s apple, but from the point of view that knowledge is a good thing). (Hayden 2021b, Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara, Ngāti Rango)

The author reinforces this connection between light and knowledge later in the same piece by using a contrasting metaphor of DARKNESS, representing Pākehā ignorance of the violent “history of injustices” faced by Māori:

While it is broadly accepted that tangata whenua have suffered too much, and that our current forms of redress will never be adequate, many New Zealanders are still **in the dark**, as Yelich-O’Connor [Lorde] was, about Māori language, culture, history and perspectives. (Hayden 2021b, Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara, Ngāti Rango)

The following authors draw on the metaphor of light in the album’s title to offer their support of *Te Ao Mārama*, using two variations of the same whakataukī:

*E huri tō aroaro ki te rā, tukuna tō atārangi ki muri i a koe.*  
Turn and face the **sun**, and let your shadows fall behind you.  
(Mohi 2021, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tūhoe)

*Whitikina koe e te rā, ko tō atārangi ka mahue ki muri.*  
May the **sun** shine upon you and cast your shadows behind you.  
(Hana Mereraiha, quoted in Hayden 2021b, Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara, Ngāti Rango)

This metaphor is used to support the argument that the mainstreaming of te reo Māori is something to be grateful for, as it was unavailable to previous generations:

Māori kids get to be part of a pop cultural zeitgeist that makes no apologies for te reo Māori. To dance, hang out with their friends, fall in love and break up to – or hate if it’s not their thing. It’s a world of **light** their grandparents never got to walk in. (Hayden 2021b, Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara, Ngāti Rango)

King (2007) notes that the phrase “the world of light” has positive connotations both in traditional Māori and biblical worldviews. She reports that several of her Māori participants identified a spiritual dimension to their learning of te reo Māori, and one referred to learning the language as opening up a new world:

*I te wā ka tīmata au i te ako i te reo, he ao anō ... te ao mārama.*  
When I started to learn the [Māori] language, it was another world ... **the world of light**.  
(King 2007: 317)

In a similar way, the authors in our research use metaphors of light to turn attention from the darkness of the past to the prospects for a hopeful future for te reo Māori.

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<sup>6</sup> In this and all subsequent examples, where authors use metaphor to express a language attitude, we use bold to identify the relevant wording.

## 5.2 *Metaphors of taonga and gift – LANGUAGE IS A TAONGA; LANGUAGE IS A GIFT*

The second category is two related metaphors of taonga, representing ownership of language as a treasured possession (LANGUAGE IS A TAONGA), and gift, representing a possession that can be given to others (LANGUAGE IS A GIFT). These metaphors appear in five opinion pieces. Two opinion pieces refer to te reo Māori as a taonga:

A claim with the Waitangi Tribunal followed, that argued “taonga” were protected under the Treaty of Waitangi and that te reo Māori was without doubt one of our most valued **treasures**. (Hayden 2021b, Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara, Ngāti Rango)

I think for Māori, taking back the **taonga** that is te reo – one that was systematically removed from us, or made so unappealing that we simply never recognised it for the **taonga** it is – comes with a lot of baggage. Or at least it does for me. (Tamaira 2021, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Pākehā)

The framing of te reo Māori as a taonga appeared in King’s (2007) research too, though it was less preferred. Her Māori language learner participants found this metaphor more relevant to native speakers of te reo Māori who could relate to the language being passed down to them through the generations – for whom the link to their language had not been broken.

Three opinion pieces refer to te reo Māori as a gift:

There is a cohort that believe te reo Māori should only be spoken by Māori. After concerted attempts by the state to eradicate the language over the past 150 years, it’s hard to blame them for being reluctant to share such a fragile **gift**. (Hayden 2021b, Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara, Ngāti Rango)

This week I’m going to build a forgiveness dimension into my messaging, to help dissipate the rage. So we can release the mauri and the **gifts** we have received from the atua. (Blank 2021, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu)

For Te Wairere, the Māori language is a **gift** to be shared, learned and received. “When it comes to Te Reo and our customs and practices, and anything that relates to our Māori culture, we see them as a **gift**,” she says. “Our language, our customs, our meeting houses - everything in our culture is a **gift**. It’s a **gift** because we are still trying to look after it and revive it. ... “Protecting our **gifts** should be our number one priority but Lorde’s goal, I believe, is also to protect and revitalise the language,” she said. (Te Wairere Ngaia, Waikato-Maniapoto<sup>7</sup>, quoted in Findlay 2021)

Both metaphors of taonga and gift focus on language as an object (King 2007), something precious and highly valued that can be acquired, cared for, and protected, and that one may choose to “share” or “release”. This framing raises questions of the ownership of te reo Māori – specifically, to whom does this gift/taonga belong?

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<sup>7</sup> We note that Te Wairere Ngaia lists her iwi affiliations online as Tainui, Taranaki, Te Arawa and Tairāwhiti. Given the differences between Findlay’s (2021) listed affiliation, and affiliations recorded elsewhere, we have attempted to check iwi affiliations for other Māori cited in his article. We acknowledge that there may still be errors, and for that we apologise.



Te reo Māori is officially recognised as a taonga in the Māori Language Act 1987<sup>8</sup> and this was also the theme of an early language promotion campaign by Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori from 1995–1999, which was branded *He Taonga Te Reo* (de Bres 2008b). While Te Taura Whiri has at times promoted te reo Māori as “a living national taonga for all New Zealanders”, it is notable that the Māori Language Act 1987 referred to te reo Māori as a taonga of Māori, not non-Māori (de Bres 2008b: 114). Its use by non-Māori thus presents potential issues of cultural appropriation, a topic that is omnipresent in the opinion pieces. One author describes one side of the debate as being that:

Lorde is ... grabbing te reo for her own fame game. She doesn't deserve Te Reo Māori, cos she hasn't struggled for it. It does not **belong** to her. (Dell 2021, Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui)

This author goes on to ask “who gets to legitimately represent and be the face of Te Reo Māori to the world?” (Dell 2021, Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui). Another comments that:

The critical issue has been whether Pākehā have the right to learn and use the language, with many post-colonialists vehemently opposed to **sharing** the language with anyone but our own. (Blank 2021, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu).

An issue raised at the time of the *He Taonga Te Reo* campaign was that the use of the term taonga presented te reo Māori as a cultural artefact to be respected, admired, and venerated, but in so doing located the language at a distance from its speakers. This was reportedly seen as daunting by some learners of Māori, increasing their feelings of alienation from their language (Boyce 2005). Similarly, the metaphors of LANGUAGE AS TAONGA and GIFT in the opinion pieces focus attention on language itself as an object of revitalisation, rather than on the experiences of its speakers. This stands in contrast to the next category of metaphor, which places speakers at the heart of the language experience.

### 5.3 *Metaphors of bodily sensations – LANGUAGE LOSS IS TRAUMA*

The third category is metaphors of bodily sensations, representing experiences of language trauma. These metaphors appear in seven opinion pieces, making them the most prominent in the data set. In contrast to metaphors focusing on language as an object, the metaphors of bodily sensations focus on speakers as subjects – and their pain. One author describes the visceral feeling of not being able to speak te reo Māori in the context of intergenerational trauma as being like:

There is a **twisted, hard knot of guilt** that I carry in the depth of me that I cannot seem to be free of. (Tamaira 2021, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Pākehā)

This feeling is intensified for the author when non-Māori have ready access to te reo Māori and are then bestowed praise for their use of it:

If te reo Māori is to thrive, it will need to be spoken by New Zealanders from many walks of life. But their very public actions juxtaposed with my own inaction makes that

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<sup>8</sup> “In the Treaty of Waitangi the Crown confirmed and guaranteed to the Māori people, among other things, all their taonga: And ... the Māori language is one such taonga” (Māori Language Act 1987).

**knot** in me pulsate with a shameful fury. It **pains** me. Sometimes it's like the knot has travelled up through my **wooden insides** and **lodged in my throat**. (Tamaira 2021, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Pākehā)

I need to get this **knot out of my throat** so maybe I can kōrero anew. (Tamaira 2021, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Pākehā)

Another author evokes the confrontation of knowing that te reo Māori is your language but that you are without it via a metaphor of a bird in distress, which is anthropomorphised as screaming:

In some ways, being bereft of our native tongue can make us extra territorial, like a **bird** that knows it's meant to fly, but has never seen the sky so it **flaps its wings** extra wide and **screams** real loud. (Jolley 2021, Waikato-Tainui)

A further author describes the lack of good feelings involved, alongside these negative feelings:

The biggest reason I don't get **warm fuzzies** from Lorde's album is I do not want to access my language from Lorde. She doesn't represent me or get my **soul strings reverberating**. (Dell 2021, Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui)

Overall, authors using metaphors of bodily sensations argue that there is an emotional tax involved in being a second-language learner of your own language. These barriers for Māori contrast with the lack of them for Lorde and for other non-Māori learners of te reo Māori.

While all the opinion pieces refer to language trauma and recognise its validity, some approach the phenomenon in different ways. One author's mixed stance is reflected in a combination of metaphors of bodily sensations. In noting reactions to the album online, he first signals empathy with other non-speakers of Maori who experience language trauma, referring to how it feels to hear Pākehā speak Māori:

Hearing the language, especially in the **mouth of a Pākehā person**, is a reminder of its **absence in your own**. This kind of cognitive burden is punishing. (Godfery 2021, Te Pahipoto, Sāmoa)

Yet the author goes on to say that:

While one can appreciate ... the discussions of trauma ..., the implications are worrying for the future of the Māori language. If we must wait for perfect circumstances to speak or sing te reo rangatira – nobody's trauma is triggered, no tokenism is detected – we may as well sign the **language's death certificate**. (Godfery 2021, Te Pahipoto, Sāmoa)

The metaphor of body in this second extract does not refer to the embodied experiences of (potential) speakers of te reo Māori, but rather to the Māori language itself, which is personified and framed as at risk of death. This links to the "discourse of endangerment" in relation to minoritised languages, which has been criticised for representing a deficit approach that does not facilitate action (Olsen-Reeder 2018) and for erasing the connection between a language and its speakers, on the basis that it is not languages that die, but people (Duchêne & Heller, 2007).

In opposing these metaphors of bodily sensations, the author shifts the focus away from the trauma of individual speakers to what he considers to be best for the language, a perspective that leads him to regard the album as a “public good”, even if it causes individuals pain. This approach is echoed in the metaphors of bodily sensations used by some other authors who support the album project. One exhorts Māori not to be “**paralysed** by our past” and refers to the healing power of music (Mohi 2021, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tūhoe). Another likens resentment towards Pākehā using te reo Māori to “**drinking poison**, then hoping it will kill your enemies” and urges forgiveness (Blank 2021, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu).

#### 5.4 *Metaphors of war – LANGUAGE CONTACT IS WAR*

The fourth category is metaphors of war, representing linguistic violence and resistance. These metaphors appear in six opinion pieces, making them the second most prominent. Several authors connect the imposition of English to the processes and objects of war, underlining the linguistic effects of colonisation on Māori:

From the moment Cook’s Endeavour made sight of land in 1769 the captain and the gentleman botanist Joseph Banks set about conferring English names on the landmarks and features they “found”. ... The histories of colonisation tend to centre around invasion and conquest ... which neatly omits how **nearly every conquest begins with a new English name**. (Godfery 2021, Te Pahipoto, Sāmoa)

But [English] it’s not my language – it was embedded in this land at the end of a **musket**. Like every other Māori person without their ancestral language, I yearn for te reo rangatira. (Godfery 2021, Te Pahipoto, Sāmoa)

War-like language is also used to depict the ongoing struggle to reclaim te reo Māori, making clear that Māori resistance to linguistic imperialism is ongoing:

By **arming** more artists with the resources and confidence to record waiata reo Māori, and using our media and digital platforms to showcase it, we can provide a fertile environment for the emergence of a bilingual landscape. (Mohi 2021, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tūhoe)

Arguing amongst ourselves about our own position of language trauma is counterproductive, especially when there is still plenty of anti-te reo sentiment to **combat**. (Mohi 2021, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tūhoe)

It speaks to the nature of our **battle**, in that we can be so consumed by our passions that we forget who the real benefactors of our efforts should be. (Jolley 2021, Waikato-Tainui)

We don’t have a workforce big enough to keep the language alive. ... There are not enough Māori to work in health, education and justice, so we have to recruit an **army of allies**. (Blank 2021, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu)

Relief is also expressed in distancing oneself from the album project. A Māori artist shares that he was approached by Lorde and her company to choreograph the music videos for the album, but was later turned down when he indicated concerns around cultural appropriation:

Later, I felt a sense of burden leave my body and knew I had **dodged a bullet**. The bullet being commercialism and record companies and (well-meaning) but ultra-privileged pop stars. (Gray 2021, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāpuhi, Te Rarawa)

These metaphors of war show that regaining te reo Māori is a significant and ongoing fight for Māori, foregrounding the fraught linguistic relationships between Māori and Pākehā in the context of Aotearoa's colonial history. This colonisation continues and, against the backdrop of globalisation, commercialisation and digitalisation, the authors urge Māori to be vigilant towards all the new forms it takes:

Whether you think the EP was a good idea or not, whether you think our Pākehā allies are getting it right or not, whether you **weaponise** money or mana, the issue remains the same. We live in a world where indigenous knowledge is harvested, manipulated and appropriated by **colonial forces**. (Jolley 2021, Waikato-Tainui)

### 5.5 *Metaphors of food – LANGUAGE IS FOOD*

The fifth category is metaphors of food, representing language acquisition. These metaphors appear in three opinion pieces. The metaphor of LANGUAGE AS FOOD arose in King's (2007) research with Māori language learners, where participants spoke of desiring te reo Māori, acquiring it, and sharing it with others:

Use of this metaphor enabled informants to describe an initial state of being without the heritage language (being hungry or not being fed), then an engagement with the language (being fed) and an ongoing relationship with the language (feeding the language to others). (King 2007: 218)

In the opinion pieces, this metaphor was instead used to highlight inequity between Māori and non-Māori learners. The translated whakataukī “do the mahi, get the treats” expresses the idea that hard work brings reward, and one author uses this metaphor to highlight how Māori and non-Māori language learning experiences differ:

Being able to learn te reo Māori without having to address colonial trauma or having your language skills equated with your validity as a cultural in-group member is a privilege that Pākehā students do not have to deal with – they can merely **dive straight into the treats**. (Te Huia 2021, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Paretekawa)

Another author argues that it need not be a case of non-Māori opting out of learning te reo Māori entirely, but of giving Māori priority:

A great Te Reo response for Pākehā is to keep allowing space and resources for Māori to learn Te Reo. Like.... you know that tikanga, when you are at the marae and you let the older and younger people **eat first**, because their needs are more than others in that room for that point in time, that's how Pākehā need to think about Te Reo. **Yeah you'll get that feed, but help other Māori to eat it first!** (Dell 2021, Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui)

### 5.6 *Metaphors of platform and stage – LANGUAGE IS A PLATFORM*

The sixth category is metaphors of platform and stage representing access to an audience. These metaphors appear in five opinion pieces, of which four include a platform metaphor, and three a stage metaphor.

In one opinion piece, two of the language experts involved in the project are quoted as saying the album provides a platform for te reo Māori:

This will be an amazing **platform** for te reo Māori – the scope for it is massive (Hinewehi Mohi, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tūhoe, quoted in Hayden 2021b)

Any **platform** where the language is, is good for the language. It gives it a reputation and an audience it wouldn't have ordinarily. (Timoti Kāretu, Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Kahungunu quoted in Hayden 2021b)

As with the metaphors of taonga and gift, this framing treats te reo Māori as an object, centering what is “good for the language”.

The authors above present the platform the album provides in positive terms, but others raise the question of who has access to the stage. One author interviewed Māori about their views on the album, one commenting that:

The reality is that Māori ourselves cannot make our language as popular as a global pop artist can. Māori have been singing in our language for decades and decades but cannot get the reach [Lorde] has. (Te Wairere Ngaia, Ngāti Apakura, Te Whānau-a-Karuwai ki Maraehara (Naati), Poutini-Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Ruanui, quoted in Findlay 2021)

This author concludes that:

To see Māori artists on the same **stage** as Lorde, we must support Te Reo-speaking singers and musicians. (Findlay 2021, iwi unknown)

Like the metaphors of food, metaphors of platform and stage thus cast a spotlight on the inequities faced by Māori when it comes to using te reo Māori, not only within the context of language learning but in many areas of social and cultural life.

While pointing to these barriers faced by Māori musicians, the interviewee quoted above expresses an ambivalent stance, advancing the argument that Lorde's platform nevertheless represents an opportunity for promoting te reo Māori in the current circumstances:

If Māori artists cannot expand to a **global stage** and a pop artist can, then let them do it. It's a win for us Māori at the end of the day. ... Why not get our language as popular as we can by capitalising on any **platform** available to us? (Te Wairere Ngaia, Ngāti Apakura, Te Whānau-a-Karuwai ki Maraehara (Naati), Poutini-Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Ruanui, quoted in Findlay 2021)

This ambivalent stance reflects a pattern across the opinion pieces, where the authors use metaphors to orient to multiple perspectives, reflecting competing attitudes about language revitalisation circulating in te ao Māori.

## 6 Discussion and conclusion

This article has examined Māori attitudes about language revitalisation expressed in ten opinion pieces and one media article responding to the launch of Lorde's album *Te Ao Mārama*, with a twofold aim. Firstly, we sought to foreground Māori perspectives in language attitudes research about te reo Māori, which recently has largely focused on non-Māori attitudes. Secondly, we sought to explore what the metaphors used by Māori commentators writing about this event can tell us about contemporary Māori attitudes towards the revitalisation of te reo Māori.

Our analysis shows that the media event of a Pākehā popstar releasing an album in te reo Māori triggered a larger set of attitudes among Māori toward the broader project of revitalising te reo Māori. A range of attitudes were expressed, both within and across the opinion pieces. While the authors tended to take a stance in favour of or against the album, most also recognised and validated differing points of view.

Despite this variation in perspectives, a key finding was that, for many Māori, engaging in learning their stolen ancestral language also requires engaging with a world of hurt. The visceral emotions revealed through our analysis of metaphors, particularly with regard to the most prominent metaphors of bodily sensations and war, suggest language attitudes researchers and language planners must take language trauma into account when researching and planning Māori language revitalisation initiatives.

While researchers and language planners may understandably be focused on what is best for “the language”, what is good for a language cannot be separated from what is good for its speakers, including potential speakers. The contrast we identify between metaphors focusing on language as object (LANGUAGE IS TAONGA or GIFT, LANGUAGE IS A PLATFORM) and speakers as subject (LANGUAGE LOSS IS TRAUMA or LANGUAGE CONTACT IS WAR) echoes the findings of King (2007), whose own analysis of metaphors revealed a disconnect between the aspirations of individual Māori and those of language planners:

The informants' experience ... contrasts with the focus of language planners in that the informants are more focussed on how the Māori language is important for them personally than how they contribute to the revitalisation of the Māori language. (King 2007: 1)

Our analysis supports King's earlier findings that the subjective perspectives and experiences of Māori regarding language revitalisation should be carefully integrated into language planning, promotion and teaching of te reo Māori, to ensure that revitalisation proceeds in a way that aligns with Māori interests. Two key interests highlighted are to preserve Māori authority over te reo Māori (TAONGA and GIFT metaphors) and to reduce the inequities Māori face in accessing and using the language, in language classes (FOOD metaphors), the cultural sector (PLATFORM/STAGE metaphors) and elsewhere.

Our findings align with those of a recent large-scale study of the experiences of Māori learners of the language (Te Huia 2022) and an earlier study focusing on the views of Māori towards non-Māori learning te reo Māori (Ngaha 2011), suggesting relevance beyond this small data set. Based on the metaphors used by the Māori authors in this study, and zooming out beyond the immediate context of the album release to the broader sociolinguistic context, we identify (and reiterate) the following recommendations. Language revitalisation planning for te reo Māori must:

- recognise the tino rangatiratanga of Māori in directing the language movement relating to their ancestral taonga and gifts;

- provide more support to reduce barriers so that Māori learners and users of te reo Māori can make it to the feast and get on the stage;
- prioritise the inclusion of Māori language learners over non-Māori language learners in language learning contexts (noting that if spaces in classes are limited, non-Māori can still access other ways to learn, e.g. via language learning technologies);
- make space for Māori to process intergenerational language trauma while learning te reo Māori; and
- raise non-Māori awareness of their privilege when learning te reo Māori, in the context of the historical and contemporary battle for the language.

Teachers of te reo Māori may wish to consider how these recommendations could be operationalised in the classroom, accounting for power dynamics between learners.

This research highlights an urgent need for non-Māori to reflect on their positionality within the space of Māori language learning – and within the space of linguistic research as well. Our analysis shows that the increased positivity towards te reo Māori among non-Māori can feel like a threat to Māori, as the dominant group risks consuming the resources apportioned to the revitalisation project, at the expense of Māori aspirations for regaining te reo Māori. As Te Huia (2022: 199–200) observes, “the path [towards normalisation of te reo] is not only about more Pākehā speaking te reo Māori, but about breaking down the political structures that favour Pākehā and increase inequities in our society”. In this context, it is important not to conflate the good intentions of non-Māori with good outcomes for Māori. If non-Māori are to contribute to the project of revitalising te reo Māori without causing further hurt and violence to Māori, they must find ways of doing the mahi without taking all the treats.

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