



Te Reo
the Journal of the Linguistic
Society of New Zealand

Volume 66
Issue 2 (*Special Issue*)

Research Article

2024
Pages 1-9

January, 2024

Māori language research

Julie Barbour

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato || University of Waikato

Peter J. Keegan

Waipapa Taumata Rau || University of Auckland

This paper is a peer-reviewed contribution from <https://nzlingsoc.makeitso.nz/journal/current-issue>

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Guest Editors: Julie Barbour and Peter Keegan

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JULIE BARBOUR

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato || University of Waikato

PETER J. KEEGAN

Waipapa Taumata Rau || University of Auckland

1 Introduction

Te reo Māori (the Māori language) is an endangered Polynesian language, Indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand (Harlow 2007). Its revitalisation can be traced back to the 1960s (Harlow 2007: 197). Te Petihana Reo Māori, the Māori Language Petition, presented to parliament in 1972 (New Zealand Parliament n.d.), raised awareness that Māori were seriously engaged in revitalising the language. A crucial step towards recognition and revitalisation of the language was the Waitangi Tribunal (1986) report that declared te reo Māori to be a taonga, a treasured possession of the Māori people, due protection from the government of Aotearoa New Zealand under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi. The language itself has been the subject of linguistic analysis since early contact between missionaries and Indigenous Māori people in the 1800s, and it is well known to the linguistic world.

The grammar of te reo Māori has been documented in several extended works, as well as in numerous academic articles, including Bruce Biggs's (1961) structural overview, and the late Tā Patu (Patrick) Hohepa's (Ngāpuhi) (1967) generative grammar of the language. Winifred Bauer's doctoral thesis (1982) and associated publications represent the most substantial grammatical accounts of te reo Māori for a linguistic readership (Bauer 1981; 1983 1991; Bauer et al. 1993; Bauer et al. 2003 [1997]). Margaret Mutu's (Ngāti Kahu, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Whātua) MPhil thesis (Mutu-Grigg 1982) provides important analysis of the manner particles. Peter Keegan's (Waikato-Maniapoto, Ngāti Porou) (1996) MPhil thesis provides an in depth analysis of reduplication. Papers by MacLagan & King (2002; 2004; 2007) consider aspects of te reo Māori pronunciation. Ray Harlow (2007) offers a general linguistic introduction to the language, and a reference grammar intended to provide a grammatical overview for advanced learners and teachers of te reo Māori (Harlow 2015 [2001]). Karena Kelly's (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine) (2015) doctoral thesis represents the first major corpus study of the syntax of te reo Māori. Maraea Hunia's (Ngāti Awa, Te Arawa) doctoral thesis (2016) is a pioneering study of the acquisition of Māori by a child. Perhaps less well known to a linguistic readership, but of considerable value to teachers of te reo Māori, are the Māori-medium texts *Mai i te Kāhano* and *Te Rito* by Hēni Jacob (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Porou) (2012; 2017).

The theme of this special issue is Māori language research. Contributions to the special issue cover linguistic topics surrounding language revitalisation and pedagogy topics, ranging from acoustic to morphosyntactic analysis. At its heart, each paper is concerned with te reo Māori, as it is learned, taught, spoken and valued in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 21st century. The inspiration for this special issue came from the global events surrounding the COVID-19

pandemic (2020–2022), and the realisation that the linguistic community in Aotearoa New Zealand could, and should, be doing more to support our Indigenous language.

2 *Te Reo (Journal of the Linguistic Society of New Zealand)* and te reo Māori (the Indigenous language of Aotearoa)

The first issue of *Te Reo*, the journal of the Linguistic Society of New Zealand (n.d.: Journal: History), was launched in 1958. The journal published articles in both English and French, with 18 French-medium articles published between 1962 and 1986, after which publications became English-medium. It wasn't until late 2021 that the first Māori-medium article was submitted for review. The then-editor, Dr. Andreea Calude, posed *Te Reo*'s largely non-Māori editorial board the question of whether *Te Reo*, the journal, should be publishing in the medium of te reo Māori, the language. The answer to Calude's question eventually came in the form of [Hay et al.'s \(2022\)](#) paper, titled “Ko te mōhiotanga huna o te hunga kore kōrero i te reo Māori”, which broke ground as the first Māori-medium publication in *Te Reo*. In this work, the authors identify a body of implicit morphosyntactic knowledge that non-Māori speakers in Aotearoa New Zealand have developed about te reo Māori, apparently as a result of ambient exposure to the language in society.

Turning to matters of content, the very first article to appear in *Te Reo* with a focus on the Māori language was G. L. Pearce's (1964) paper on the forms of the Māori passive suffix. Hohepa's (1966; 1969) papers on negation in te reo Māori were the second and third papers to focus on the Māori language. Hohepa's papers are particularly noteworthy because they are the first works in the journal by a Māori academic about the Māori language. In the six and a half decades since *Te Reo* was launched, a total of 29 papers have been published concerning the Māori language, its speakers, and its revitalisation.

Among the articles published in *Te Reo* with a focus on te reo Māori, there is a short paper by Kathy Dewes (Te Arawa, Ngāti Porou), Mike Hollings (Ngāti Raukawa), Hēni Jacob (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Porou) and Hine-i-haea Murphy (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Apa), titled “The current status of the Māori language and the role of the linguist” (Dewes et al. 1998). This paper is an edited transcript of a panel presentation given by the authors at the *Language and Society Conference* of 1998. It represents a call to action for linguists. Dewes et al. (1998: 105) identify the “need to increase the number of Māori involved in the field of linguistics”, and ask linguists to carefully consider the nature of their research, and prioritise research that focuses “on topics that benefit Māori and the Māori-speaking community, rather than just reflecting the particular interest of the non-Māori researcher”. Crucially, they observe that “linguists can be involved in the promotion of language issues in society in general, by stimulating debate and raising language issues for the wider society to consider and respond to” (Dewes et al. 1998: 105).

Two and a half decades later, we offer the beginnings of a response in the form of this special issue, *Te Reo* 66(2). In addition to presenting a collection of research papers that focus on te reo Māori, we plan to initiate the translation of each paper into the Māori language, thus supporting access to a body of published linguistic research in te reo Māori. We hope that further special issues of *Te Reo*, focusing on te reo Māori and other Polynesian/Pacific languages, will appear in the near future.

3 This special issue

This special issue has a focus on Māori language research, primarily with and by academics who identify as Māori. The research has taken place in the context of the revitalisation of te reo Māori, which itself has been of considerable interest to linguists (see for example, King 2001; 2006; 2014; 2018; Harlow 2007; Keegan 2017). Attitudes towards endangered languages are an important consideration in contexts of language revitalisation. A substantial body of research has considered attitudes to the Māori language in Aotearoa including work by Nicholson & Garland (1991), Lane (2003), Boyce (2005), de Bres (2008; 2009; 2011), Keegan et al. (2010), Te Puni Kōkiri (2002; 2003; 2006; 2010), Myhre (2015), Flavell (2020), and Te Huia (2022). **Ia Morrison-Young** (Te Ātiawa) and **Julia de Bres** add a new dimension to the linguistic literature on language attitudes in Aotearoa with their article on attitudes of Māori to the release of popstar Lorde's mini album *Te Ao Mārama*, in 2021. They examine language attitudes through metaphors used by Māori commentators, responding to the album's release. The study of metaphor, and figurative language more broadly, used by Māori to express Māori world views, includes publications by King (2007), Papa & Papa (2011), Mika & Stewart (2017), Pihama et al. (2019), Black (2021; 2023), Apiata (2021) and Mead & Grove (2023).

Documenting the impact of language revitalisation is an important step in assessing where and how revitalisation initiatives are most efficacious. Contributing to a body of research that reports on speaker numbers (Stats NZ 2014; 2020; 2022; Lane & Earle 2015; Hutchings et al. 2017; King & Cunningham 2017; Lane 2020; Simmonds et al. 2020; Nicholson Consulting & Kōtātā Insight 2021), independent researcher **Chris Lane** provides an analysis of data from Te Kupenga 2018 (Stats NZ 2018). Lane estimates the numbers of first and second language speakers of te reo Māori. Through a comparison of speaker numbers across three generations, Lane's analysis documents a crucial resurgence in speaker numbers in the youngest generation. His analysis reveals the importance of both first- and second-language speakers to the revitalisation of the language. While much research has focussed on the role of educational initiatives to revitalise the language, Lane finds that both educational and noneducational contexts are important in terms of providing opportunities for learning te reo Māori.

There is a growing demand for both Pākehā and Māori to learn te reo Māori, with anecdotal reports of waiting lists for places in classes, and statistics documenting the increase of enrolments in formal language courses (Education Counts 2023). Speaking to the teaching of Māori language pronunciation, **Peter Keegan** (Waikato-Maniapoto, Ngāti Porou) considers the importance of research to successful teaching. In his paper, Keegan laments the lack of research in this area, and critically reviews a number of online resources that discuss Māori pronunciation. Keegan offers a narrative of his own teaching practices, demonstrating how research into acoustic phonetics (Keegan et al. 2014, Watson et al. 2016) and the phonology of te reo Māori (Bauer et al. 1993, Harlow 2007, Keegan et al. 2009; 2014) can be used to support tertiary education students to better understand the pronunciation of te reo Māori.

While there is an existing body of research that documents structural properties of te reo Māori, there remains much to be learned. In their paper on *katoa*, **Kanauhea Wessels** (Waikato), **Beau Stowers** (Te Rarawa) and **Julie Barbour** offer a contribution to the grammatical literature on te reo Māori, with a study of the universal quantifier, its morphosyntactic distribution, and its relationship to universal quantifiers in other languages of the Polynesian family. The authors aim to demonstrate the considerable scope for future grammatical research about te reo Māori. Both qualitative analyses by and with advanced speakers of the language, and quantitative analyses of corpora of Māori language materials (see for example, Kelly 2015) are likely to yield important insights for linguists, language teachers, and language learners alike.

The final topic covered in this special issue concerns the acoustic analysis of te reo Māori. This topic has attracted considerable interest in the last decade and a half, with the MAONZE research programme building a body of research that examines te reo Māori and New Zealand English pronunciation since the earliest recordings were made of speakers born in the late 19th century (MAONZE n.d.). Publications include Harlow et al. (2009), King et al. (2010 ; 2011), Maclagan et al. (2013), Keegan et al. (2014) and King et al. (2020). The acoustic research reported in this special issue contributes to our understanding of how te reo Māori is changing through time, and highlights potential issues that can be addressed in the teaching of te reo Māori. **Isabella Shields** (Ngāti Porou), **Catherine Watson** and **Peter Keegan** (Waikato-Maniapoto/Ngāti Porou) report on preliminary investigations into the acoustics of the /r/ sound in te reo Māori. Spectrographic analyses of male *kaumātua* (elders) of the MAONZE corpus, evidence suggests /r/ appears predominantly as a flap, and occasionally as an approximant, along with a wide range of realisations. They also describe preliminary results from an individual reading *Ngā Mahi a Ngā Tūpuna* (Grey & Williams, 1971) in which duration appears to be influenced by proximity to a stressed syllable.

Margaret Maclagan, **Toby Macrae** (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa) and **Joshua Wilson Black** report on the pronunciation of the word Māori in the speech of three groups of Māori speakers from different generations. Like Shields et al. (this issue), they focus on production of the consonant /r/, where they identify that there has been an increase in /r/ being realised as a approximant (as opposed to a tap). They also assess the pronunciation of the diphthong /a:o/, noting how, over time, older female and younger second-language speakers have tended to monophthongise the /a:o/ diphthong.

Acknowledgements

This special issue has come about with the support of the linguistic community in Aotearoa New Zealand. As editors, we acknowledge and offer our thanks to the local and international reviewers of the papers herein and support from the current editor and editorial board members. Your time, intellectual effort, and supportive contributions have been very well received. We particularly acknowledge our anonymous reviewer for her thoughtful review of the full set of special issue papers, under considerable time pressure. Most importantly, we thank our authors for their contributions.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa!

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