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# Research report: Maori and Pakeha Use of Selected Pragmatic Devices in a Sample of New Zealand English[1]

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## Introduction

Pragmatic devices[2] such as *you know*, *I think*, and *eh* are as widespread in New Zealand English as they are in other varieties of spoken English. Although often characterised as mere verbal fillers, such features in fact express a wide range of epistemic and social meanings. Thus they may reflect a speaker's degree of certainty in relation to the propositional content of a given utterance, as well as performing various addressee-oriented functions such as creating solidarity or establishing the existence of shared understanding with an addressee (eg Coates 1987, Holmes 1986, 1990, Schiffrin 1987). Moreover, recent research on the social and stylistic distribution of pragmatic devices in English provides increasingly firm evidence that individual pragmatic devices cannot be assumed to be randomly interchangeable. It is possible to observe patterns in a speaker's choice of particular forms or types of discourse marker which correlate systematically with a range of social and contextual variables. Ethnicity is one such variable.

Firstly, specific forms may function as markers of ethnic or cultural identity. For example, Youssef (1993) reports that the set marking tag *an ting* signals Creole identity in Trinidad, and Bailey (1983) identifies the use of the invariant endtag *eh* as a marker of 'Canadianism' in North America. In New Zealand there is a long folklinguistic tradition linking the distinctive New Zealand variant of *eh*[3] with the speech of Maori people. The Wellington social dialect survey (Holmes, Bell and Boyce 1991) provided the first concrete sociolinguistic evidence that Maori speakers use *eh* significantly

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[1] This research was made possible by a grant from the New Zealand Foundation for Research,Science and Technology. The results of the study reported here were first presented at the Fifth New Zealand Language and Society Conference in June 1997.
[2] Pragmatic devices are also often referred to as pragmatic particles (Holmes 1990), discourse markers (Schiffrin 1897) and epistemic modal forms (Coates 1987).
[3] Canadian *eh* is pronounced as [e] (Bailey 1983) by comparison with New Zealand [ei—].

more than Pakeha speakers. In a more detailed analysis of this data, Meyerhoff (1994) concludes that *eh* currently functions as a marker of Maori ethnic identity, particularly for Maori men, but that it is increasingly being adopted by young Pakeha speakers as well, perhaps indicating a change from below (see also Stubbe and Holmes 1995). In another small study, Gardiner (1993) analysed the use of *eh* by five Maori women and two Maori men in conversations: all the speakers recorded a similarly high frequency of *eh* to those recorded for the Maori informants in the Wellington survey, with the Maori men again using this form more frequently than the Maori women. Finally, in a sociolinguistic study of style, Bell and Johnson (1997) found *eh* was clearly functioning as a marker of in-group identity. Their Maori male informant produced *eh* significantly more often than any of the other informants, particularly when interacting with the Maori male interviewer, and his use of *eh* tended to cluster most heavily during the discussion of Maori topics, often co-occurring with the use of Maori lexical items. However, when he was talking to the Pakeha interviewer, his *eh*-usage dropped by more than half, with a corresponding rise in the use of *you know* and the high rising terminal intonation pattern. Bell and Johnson (1997:17) thus conclude that this informant did not use *eh* "to claim Maoriness to a non-Maori, but to establish solidarity with other Maori", and especially another Maori man.

Secondly, there is also some evidence from research into New Zealand English of a correlation between ethnicity and the frequency of addressee-oriented pragmatic devices more generally. Addressee-oriented devices such as *eh* or *you know* tend to have a positive politeness function, in that they are used to reduce social distance and create solidarity between interlocutors, whereas speaker-oriented devices such as *I think* or *I suppose* avoid the assumption that the knowledge or opinions expressed are shared, and thus function as negative politeness strategies. In common with other Pacific cultures, Maori place great importance on the creation of involvement in informal discourse (Metge and Kinloch 1984). Britain (1992) suggests that this would lead us to expect to find a greater use of positive politeness devices by Maori speakers of New Zealand English. There is some empirical support for this hypothesis. For instance, Gardiner (1993) found that the Maori speakers in her sample, and particularly the men, used a high frequency of both *you know* and *eh*. In Bell and Johnson's (1997) data, both Maori informants used *you know* relatively frequently, although in this case gender was an even more salient variable, with the Maori and Pakeha men producing the highest frequencies of this device. Britain (1992) and Bell and Johnson (1997) also report a proportionately higher incidence in Maori speech of another addressee-oriented device which has the pragmatic function of establishing or maintaining solidarity between speaker and listener: the high-rise terminal intonation (HRT).

Gender and social class are also relevant variables, and often interact with ethnicity. Erman (1992), studying conversations taken from the London-Lund corpus, found that British men used the expressions *you*

*know*, *you see* and *I mean* between 25% to 50% more often than women, and that such expressions were less frequent in mixed-sex environments. New Zealand men, both Maori and Pakeha, have also been reported to use the addressee-oriented devices *eh* and *you know* more frequently than women (Stubbe and Holmes 1995, Bell and Johnson 1997), and Britain (1992) found the use of HRTs to be favoured by young Pakeha women as well as by Maori speakers. With respect to social class, Dines (1980) reports that working class Australian women used a higher frequency of set marking tags (eg *or something*, *and all that (sort of) stuff*) than a middle class comparison group, a finding confirmed for New Zealand English by Britain (1992a) and Dreyer (1993). Huspek (1989) and Woods (1991) both identify social class patterns in the distribution of phrases like *I think* and *you know* in North American speech, with addressee-oriented devices like *you know* being used more by working-class speakers, and the upper classes using speaker-oriented features more frequently.

Finally, there is a well-documented correlation between the formality of the setting and the frequency of addressee- and speaker-oriented pragmatic devices. In general, less formal, semi-intimate contexts produce a higher incidence of pragmatic devices functioning with an addressee-orientation, especially in informal interactions where the maintenance of social relationships takes precedence over the exchange of information (eg Holmes 1986, Preisler 1986). In more formal speech contexts, there is a greater incidence of speaker-oriented devices (Coates 1987, Holmes 1984, 1990, Ostman 1981), and while addressee-oriented forms such as *you know* are also heard in this context, they are less frequent, with marked vernacular forms (such as *eh* in New Zealand English), occurring very rarely if at all.

The findings of a recent study of pragmatic devices in New Zealand English (reported in Stubbe and Holmes 1995) were consistent with many of the patterns summarised above. This study analysed the distribution of a range of pragmatic devices in conversations and radio interviews involving 53 Pakeha speakers of New Zealand English. The analysis identified four particularly clear sets of interactions between speaker and stylistic variables and the relative frequencies of several pragmatic devices: (1) the addressee oriented devices *eh* was almost entirely restricted to conversational contexts, and occurred very rarely overall, except in the speech of young working class men; (2) *you know* occurred throughout the sample, and had no unequivocal association with a particular group or context, but was significantly more frequent in the less formal conversational context, and in the speech of young working class speakers, in particularly young working class men; (3) tag questions were found to function similarly to *eh* and *you know*, but were much more frequent in the speech of middle class informants, in particular those in the mid-age category; and (4) the speaker-oriented device *I think* was most prevalent in the speech of middle class speakers and in the more formal radio interview context.

The report presented here summarises the results of a follow-up analysis of the distribution of these four pragmatic devices in the speech of

an equivalent sample of Maori informants, and compares the results with the patterns found for Pakeha speakers.

**Method**

*The sample*

32 extracts from conversations and radio interviews were drawn from the Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English (WCSNZE).The informants were 44 young and mid-aged middle class Maori speakers (aged 16-30 and 40-55). Each extract was approximately 15-20 minutes in length (2000-2500 words each) producing a sample of approximately 73,000 words in total. Table 1 summarises the sample design, which allows for comparisons between the Maori informants on the basis of age, gender and speech style.

***Table 1: Sample design — Maori speakers***

| | *YOUNG* | | *MID-AGE* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* |
| Conversation | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Interview | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

Table 2 shows the sample design used for the earlier study (Stubbe and Holmes 1995) which focused on Pakeha speakers. Demographic constraints on the data available in the WCSNZE meant it was not possible to construct a sample of Maori speakers completely parallel in design to that used for the Pakeha study, although both samples are of a similar size. All the Maori data comes from middle class informants, and therefore no class comparison is possible, although unlike the Pakeha sample, the Maori sample does include a contrast on the dimension of age in the interview data. It is however possible to directly compare the Maori and Pakeha data for middle class speakers from both age groups in conversations, and for mid-age speakers in the interview context.

It should also be noted that although both designs incorporate a contrast along the dimension of style, the radio interview material is not entirely comparable in the two samples. With one exception, the radio interviews in the Maori sample are sourced from local iwi radio stations, and are thus at the less formal end of that particular style continuum. The majority of the Pakeha interviews were taken from National Radio broadcasts, which, with the exception of some material from the Spectrum programme, are therefore relatively formal by comparison.

***Table 2: Sample design — Pakeha speakers***

| | *Middle class* | | | | *Working class* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Young* | | *Mid-age* | | *Young* | *Mid-age* | |
| | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* |
| Conv | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | – |
| Int | – | – | 6 | 6 | – | – | 5 |

*Discourse variables*

The earlier study looked at a range of pragmatic devices along a functional continuum from *eh*, which is primarily addressee-oriented, to *I think* which is an archetypal speaker-oriented device. Three addressee-oriented devices (eh, *you know* and tag questions), and one speaker-oriented device (*I think*) were selected for follow-up analysis in the Maori data. These variables were chosen because (1) they displayed the greatest differentiation in the Pakeha sample according to the variables of style, class, age and gender, (2) they could be clearly categorised as being either addressee- or speaker-oriented, and (3) in the case of *eh*, previous research has indicated its salience as an ethnic identity marker.

All candidate tokens were identified by means of the computerised search programme PHRASE. Positive identification was made by checking the local interaction context using both transcripts and audiotapes. To be classified as a pragmatic device, each candidate token had to meet two basic conditions: (1) it had a clear interactive function, expressing affective meaning and/or epistemic modality; and (2) it functioned as a "filler" in the sense that it could be omitted without substantially affecting the semantic or syntactic structure of the utterance. A number of specific criteria were also applied to each variable.

The invariant tag *eh* was classified as a pragmatic device when it functioned to signal solidarity and presupposed shared understanding, which it did in virtually all cases, as in Example (1), but was excluded when used as a clarification request.

*Example 1*

*Context:* Two young Maori men chatting about sport.

Paora: mm yeah I mean they were creating records when they were in their twenties and that but they've really hit their peak now + in their thirties + man that's just incredible *eh* everyone's saying no they're too they're too old they're too old and they won't + they won't last

Trevor: no well if they just- they just must have it up top *eh*

As seen in Example 2, *you know* was classified as a pragmatic device when used with interactive functions such as expressing the speaker's confidence that the addressee shared relevant background knowledge, reassuring the addressee of the validity of the proposition, and expressing uncertainty regarding either the addressee's attitude or the linguistic precision of the message. It was excluded from the analysis when it functioned as an abbreviated form of *do you know...* or as a lexical verb as in *you know Mary, don't you?*

*Example 2*
*Context:* Interview on Te Puna Wai Korero, National Programme

> *I think* the *you know* the two things that really we've wanted to to get moving and-is to try and do something about er upskilling our people in terms of research *you know* not many of our people are actually in er have the skills er nor know where to *you know* to find those skills to try and help them

Canonical tag questions such as *wouldn't it* and *are you* were included where they functioned affectively to check the 'taken-for-grantedness' of what was being said (cf Coates 1989:117), in a similar way to other addressee-oriented devices like *eh* and *you know*. The speaker-oriented device *I think* has a complex range of both affective and epistemic meanings which can be broadly categorised as 'deliberative' and 'tentative'(see Holmes 1990); both sets of functions were included in the analysis.

In the few instances where reliable identification was impossible (eg due to an unclear section of recording, a lack of context or ambiguity) the token was excluded from the analysis. Raw scores for each variable were translated into frequency index scores for each variable by calculating the rate of occurrence over 10,000 words, thus allowing valid whole number comparisons to be made between cells and between samples.

**Results**

*Distribution of variables in the Maori sample*

Table 3 shows the overall distribution of the four variables across the Maori data set. Both *you know* and *I think* are fairly evenly distributed across both speech styles, and occur ubiquitously throughout the individual samples. *You know* is by far the most frequently occurring device with 463 tokens in all. It occurs commonly in both contexts, but is clearly more frequent in the informal speech style. Conversely, *I think* is more frequent in the interview context. It also occurs relatively frequently overall, although at less than half the rate of *you know*.

***Table 3: Overall frequencies for Maori speakers (Raw) and index scores***

| | *eh* | *you know* | *tags* | *I think* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Conversation (34,000 words) | (122) 36 | (265) 78 | (8) 2 | (81) 24 |
| Interview (39,000 words) | (4) 1 | (198) 51 | (2) .5 | (140) 36 |
| Total (73,000 words) | (126) 17 | (463) 63 | (10) 1 | (221) 30 |

Index score x 0.1 = approximate rate per 1000 words

*Eh* is considerably less frequent overall than either *you know* or *I think*, but has a clearly bipolar distribution, with only four occurrences in the interview data. It is therefore proportionately more frequent in the conversational data where it is the second most frequent of the variables with an index score of 36 compared to 78 for *you know* and 24 for *I think*. This is comparable with the average index score for working class Maori speakers in the free speech section of the Wellington social dialect survey. *Eh* occurs in all but one of the conversation extracts, averaging 10 tokens per extract. In two cases, both involving male participants who know each other extremely well, the number of tokens is well above this average (28 and 37 respectively), but even when these two extracts are excluded, *eh* still occurs at an average rate of 6 tokens per interaction. This is a high rate of occurrence for such a perceptually salient discourse variable. By contrast, tag questions occurred only ten times in the entire Maori dataset.

***Table 4: Frequency of* eh *by age, gender and style for Maori speakers (Indexed rates)***

| | *MAORI MALE* | | | *MAORI FEMALE* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Young* | *Mid-age* | *Total* | *Young* | *Mid-age* | *Total* |
| Conversation | 88 | 44 | **64** | 13 | 11 | **12** |
| Interview | 0 | 0 | **0** | 3 | 1 | **2** |

Index score x 0.1 = approximate rate per 1000 words

Table 4 shows the distribution of *eh* in the Maori sample by age, gender and style. From these figures it is clear that in this sample *eh* occurs primarily in conversations and in the speech of the Maori men. The highest users of *eh* by a large margin are the young Maori men, who used it twice as frequently as the mid-age men and more than seven times more often than the women in this sample. These relativities hold even when allowance is made for the two male interactions with very high rates of *eh* usage.

Table 5 summarises the distribution of *you know* by age, gender and style. These results are less straightforward to interpret than those for *eh*, but there are nevertheless some interesting patterns in the data. First, as for *eh*, there is a clear pattern of variation according to gender. In both styles and for both age groups, the men score considerably higher than the women. Second, there is a consistent age effect, although this interacts with style. Thus in the conversational data we see a higher frequency of *you know* from both mid-age men and women as compared with the younger speakers, but this pattern is reversed in the interview context.

***Table 5: Frequency of* you know *by age, gender and style for Maori speakers (Indexed rates)***

| | *MAORI MALE* | | | *MAORI FEMALE* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Young* | *Mid-age* | *Total* | *Young* | *Mid-age* | *Total* |
| Conversation | 79 | 100 | **90** | 48 | 83 | **67** |
| Interview | 90 | 56 | **72** | 36 | 24 | **30** |
| Totals | 85 | 75 | **80** | 41 | 55 | **48** |

Index score x 0.1 = approximate rate per 1000 words

With respect to style, a comparison of the total index scores for conversation and interview styles shows a similar pattern to that found elsewhere; namely, a reduction in the frequency of *you know* in the more formal context. However, this pattern is largely accounted for by the mid-age speakers, and to a lesser extent by the young women, while the young men actually increase their usage of *you know* in the interview context. The reasons for this exception to the general pattern are unclear, but may relate to age-related differences in how formality is marked (see below).

Table 6 summarises the patterns for *I think*. There is a slight but consistent tendency apparent in the data for the women to produce more of this variable than the men. The frequencies in the conversation data are remarkably uniform. However, the young and mid-age speakers show different patterns in the interviews: the young speakers increase their *I think*

index in the more formal context, while the mid-age speakers make little distinction as measured by this variable.

***Table 6: Frequency index of I think by age, gender and style for Maori speakers (Indexed rates)***

| | *MALE* | | | *FEMALE* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Young* | *Mid-age* | *Total* | *Young* | *Mid-age* | *Total* |
| Conversation | 17 | 26 | **22** | 23 | 27 | **25** |
| Interview | 42 | 23 | **32** | 46 | 34 | **40** |
| Totals | 31 | 24 | **26** | 35 | 31 | **33** |

Index score x 0.1 = approximate rate per 1000 words

This is a complementary pattern to that for *you know*, suggesting that young and mid-age Maori speakers use somewhat different strategies to mark the difference in formality. The young speakers double their use of *I think* in the interview context, while maintaining a relatively high frequency of *you know*. The mid-age speakers, on the other hand, markedly reduce their use of *you know* in the interview context, but produce similar rates of *I think* in the two contexts.

*Comparison of the Maori and Pakeha samples*

Table 7 summarises the overall distribution of the four variables analysed for the Maori and Pakeha data in those sub-sets of the two samples which are directly comparable. It is clear that both *eh* and *you know* are significantly more frequent overall in the Maori data, particularly in conversation. Although not a high frequency item, tag questions are used far more often by the Pakeha than by the Maori speakers.

In total, the three addressee-oriented devices (AODs) occur over twice as often in the Maori data as in the Pakeha data (combined index 89 versus 41), even allowing for the fact that tag questions were used very rarely by the Maori informants. In contrast, the speaker-oriented device *I think* was produced about 50% more frequently by the Pakeha speakers. Overall, both Maori and Pakeha speakers in the interview context used the addressee-oriented devices considerably less frequently and *I think* somewhat more frequently than in conversation, although, as discussed above, there were some variations to this pattern in the Maori data.

Figure 1 illustrates in greater detail how the four pragmatic devices analysed are distributed across the Maori and Pakeha conversation samples in relation to one another. There is relatively little variation for the speaker-

***Table 7: Comparison of Maori and Pakeha (raw) and index scores MC speakers in conversations and interviews***

| | *Conversations (Young and mid-age)* | | *Interviews (Mid-age)* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Maori* | *Pakeha* | *Maori* | *Pakeha* |
| eh | (122) 36 | (13) 4 | (1) 1.5 | (0) 0 |
| you know | (265) 78 | (86) 30 | (82) 41 | (49) 21 |
| tags | (8) 2 | (64) 22 | (2) 1 | (1) 0.5 |
| All AODs | (395) 116 | (163) 56 | (85) 43 | (50) 22 |
| I think | (81) 24 | (98) 34 | (57) 29 | (100) 44 |
| Total words in sub-sample | approx 34000 | approx 29000 | approx 20000 | approx 23000 |

Index score x 0.1 = approximate rate per 1000 words

oriented device *I think*, although there is a slight tendency for this variable to be used more by older speakers, and by Pakeha speakers. The distributions of the addressee-oriented devices are much more striking. Figure 1 shows a clear crossover between Maori and Pakeha with respect to the use of tag questions and *eh* (similar to the nearly complementary social class distribution found in the Pakeha data- see Stubbe and Holmes 1995). Figure 1 also highlights the quite marked ethnic difference already noted in the use of *you know*, particularly in the case of the older Maori speakers.

Figure 2 breaks the figures down further, and illustrates the inter-related effects of age and gender on the Maori distributions. These effects are not nearly as marked in the Pakeha data, where they are present at all. *You know* is most strongly associated with the older Maori speakers, while *eh* is mostly produced by the Maori male speakers, and especially the younger men. These intra-group differences are very interesting, not least because they are not mirrored in the Pakeha data to anything approaching the same extent.

The patterns for mid-age speakers in the interview context are slightly different. Table 3 shows that *eh* and tag questions do not feature here for either ethnic group. This is not unexpected given the asymmetrical relationship between participants in the interview context (see Stubbe and Holmes 1995:80 for further discussion of this point). The tendency for *you know* to occur more frequently in the Maori data remains, but is not quite as

***Figure 1. Distribution of 'eh', 'you know' tags and 'I think' (Ethnicity x age)*** *(MC Maori and Pakeha speakers in conversation)*

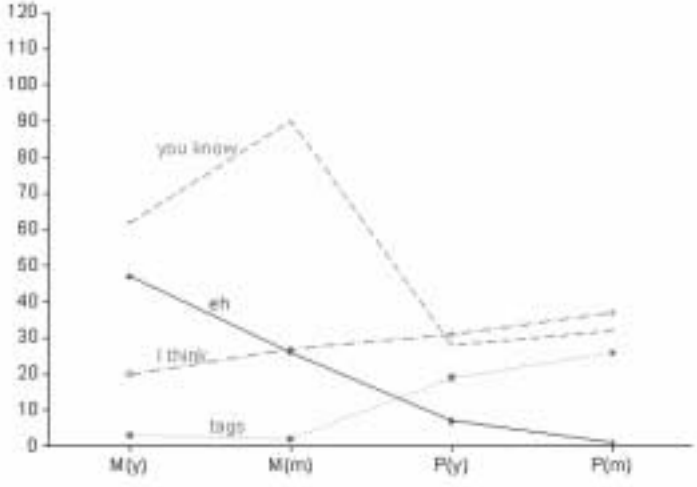
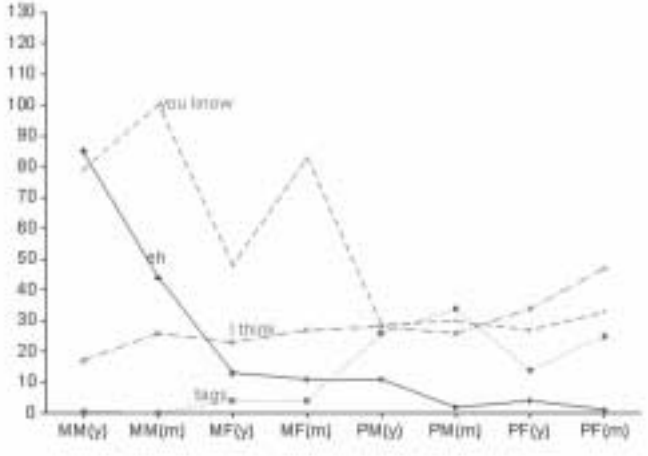


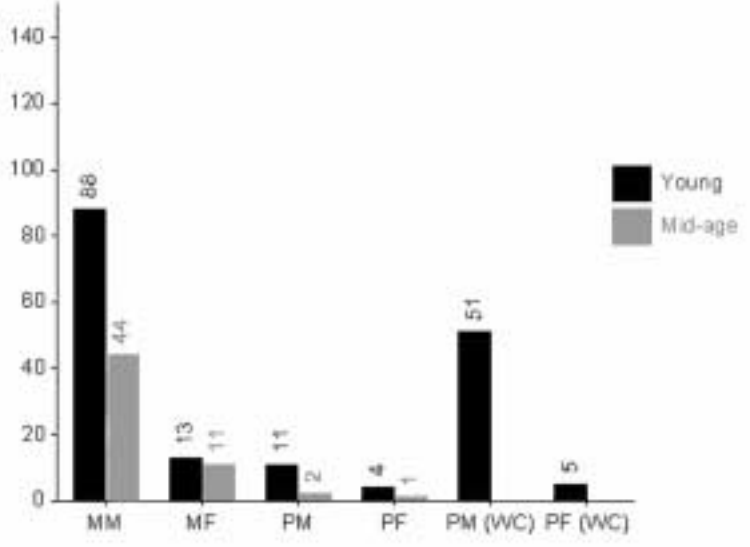

***Figure 2. Distribution of 'eh', 'you know' tags and 'I think' (Ethnicity x age x gender)*** *(MC Maori and Pakeha speakers in conversation)*



strong in this context, and there is a clear tendency for *I think* to occur more frequently in the Pakeha data. These last two results are likely to be explained at least in part by differences in formality in the two sets of radio interview data (see above), as well as the age-related patterns noted in the Maori data.

Figure 3 summarises the distribution of *eh* in the Maori conversational data and compares it with the Pakeha sample. It is quite clear that the use of *eh* is associated primarily with Maori speakers and with (young) male speakers. The young middle class Maori men produced the highest frequency by far, with an index score of 88, considerably higher than the "eh index" recorded for young working class Maori men in the Wellington social dialect survey. The young working class Pakeha men in the WCSNZE sample produced the second highest frequency of *eh*, at an index of 51 just a little higher than that of the middle class, mid-age Maori men. Extrapolating from these results, we would expect that similarly informal conversational data from Maori working class speakers would produce the highest frequencies of all. Although the Maori women here used *eh* somewhat more often overall than the Pakeha speakers, their usage is equivalent to that of the young middle class Pakeha men, and very low by comparison with that of the Maori men.

***Figure 3. Relative frequency of 'eh' in conversation (Ethnicity x age x gender)***



**Conclusion**

The results of this study are consistent with the other research summarised in the introduction: namely, there was a strong correlation between various non-linguistic variables, especially ethnicity, and the distribution patterns of the four pragmatic devices analysed. A number of these patterns were common to both the Maori and Pakeha samples: (1) The three addressee-oriented devices were much more frequent in informal conversation, while the speaker-oriented device *I think* was more frequent in the interview context. (2) In both samples *you know* was ubiquitous and occurred very frequently in both contexts, although it was used most often in conversation. (3) Tags and *eh* on the other hand were restricted almost entirely to conversation, and were much less frequent overall in relative terms. (4) In both samples, it was young men who produced *eh* by far the most frequently.

However, the analysis also provided some clearcut evidence of different patterns for Maori and Pakeha. First, the Maori speakers used a much higher proportion overall (more than double) of addressee-oriented devices than the Pakeha speakers. As discussed earlier, these positive politeness devices function to establish and maintain in-group solidarity and involvement, both crucial cultural values for Maori. Interestingly, though, the Maori speakers used virtually no tag questions, with *eh* and occasionally *you know* filling that slot instead. There was a clear ethnic difference in the use of *you know*, which was two and a half times more frequent in the Maori data. This interacted with an age difference, with the mid-age Maori speakers using this variable more often than the young speakers.

The data also suggests that Maori and Pakeha may use different strategies for signalling relative formality. Unlike the Pakeha informants, the older Maori speakers tended not to increase their frequency of *I think* in the interview context, instead signalling the more formal style by a marked reduction in the frequency of *you know*. The younger Maori speakers were more similar to the Pakeha norm in that they doubled their use of *I think* in the more formal context, but unlike the Pakeha speakers, they continued to produce a very high rate of *you know*. This interpretation must remain somewhat tentative however, given the different sources of the radio interview data.

Finally, while a high *eh* index was certainly characteristic of interactions involving both Maori and Pakeha young men, this study confirms previous suggestions that *eh* functions as a salient marker of Maori in-group identity, for Maori men in particular. In the first instance, the *eh* index for the mid-age (and middle class) Maori men was equivalent to that of the young Pakeha working class men, and secondly, the young (middle class) Maori men produced the highest rate in the samples analysed here, with a statistically significant differential between them and any other groups. The reading of *eh* as a marker of ethnic identity is strengthened by a qualitative analysis of the two Maori interactions with particularly high *eh* indexes. In both cases, the topics discussed specifically relate to Maori issues, and the

participants have shared childhood roots and experiences, thus making ethnicity highly salient.

One interpretation of these patterns is that, in addition to its clear function as an in-group marker of Maori (male) identity, *eh* is fast becoming established as a vernacular feature of New Zealand English amongst the wider population, with a general function of signalling conversational solidarity[4]. A change in progress from below would account, at least in part, for the relatively high frequency of *eh* in the speech of young working class Pakeha men (see also Stubbe and Holmes: 80-1). Additionally or alternatively, it seems likely that *eh* functions as a marker of (young) male identity and solidarity. The fact that all three factors apply simultaneously in the case of the young Maori men in this sample would seem to account very nicely for the relatively high frequency of *eh* in their speech.

Clearly, there is scope for further research to explore the patterns outlined in this report in greater depth. In particular, the possibility that Maori and Pakeha take different approaches to marking formality needs to be checked more thoroughly in a range of contexts. It would also be useful to extend the analysis to incorporate cross-ethnic interactions and to add working class Maori informants to the sample.

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