

## ACADEMIC WRITING AND TRANSLATION IN TE REO MĀORI

Gianna Leoni and Megan Pōtiki

Māori are often used as an example of success for the rest of the world particularly in indigenous and minority language revitalisation. This is evidenced by the establishment of Māori immersion education programmes,<sup>1</sup> iwi radio stations and broadcasting,<sup>2</sup> Te Taura Whiri o Te Reo Māori,<sup>3</sup> and iwi language revitalisation programmes.<sup>4</sup> Te reo Māori is an official language by law.<sup>5</sup> A significant provision of government funding has been allocated to 'supporting' the language for example the Budget of 2016 provided \$34.6 million of operating funding over four years to support the revitalisation of te reo Māori across key Māori language initiatives.<sup>6</sup>

It is officially recognised in the Māori Language Act 1987, that the language is a 'taonga'.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas in the Treaty of Waitangi the Crown confirmed and guaranteed to the Māori people, among other things, all their taonga: And whereas the Māori language is one such taonga.<sup>8</sup>

When people travel the world, te reo Māori and Māori markers of identity are what New Zealand is known for. It is here that it is used as a national language, for example, the All Black haka which is performed in te reo Māori and is a very Māori cultural expression, simply highlights the importance of te reo Māori. Furthermore, the Māori language becomes an identity marker for all New Zealanders, whether consciously or not.

Despite all of the positive steps forward, the 2013 Census showed a decline in speakers (125,352) from 2006 (131,613) when the previous census was conducted.<sup>9</sup> The Māori population is growing, but the Māori speaking population has dropped. We can see that the majority of the speakers are 65 years and older and yet arguably intergenerational transmission is still not a complete success. Therefore, although we are a taura (an example) for the rest of the world, there is still plenty of work needed in the space of Māori language revitalisation.

One of the main issues for users of te reo Māori is having to choose when to use the language. Many people understand some Māori language but cannot necessarily speak back in te reo Māori. Some people want to use the language but would not be able to participate in a simple conversation. Therefore, we are in interesting times with the revitalisation of te reo Māori and we would argue that te reo Māori has plateaued in this ongoing journey. For example, the resource of proficient Māori language speakers for translation work is very limited in our experience.

Although many positives have emerged in relation to Māori language revitalisation as previously mentioned, the normalisation and maintenance of te reo Māori continues to be a challenge, and the use of the language is imbalanced throughout the different domains of New Zealand society. The authors work within the University paradigm and regularly use te reo Māori when writing academic work or teaching. This allows them to indigenise the domain that they work in. Dr Leoni wrote her thesis in te reo Māori,<sup>10</sup> graduating in 2016 from the University of Otago. Both authors have published in te reo Māori<sup>11</sup> and see themselves as 'language avengers', actively promoting written Māori language in the academic domain. The authors deem the promotion of writing in te reo Māori as an important contribution to Māori language revitalisation. The authors have recognised the importance of using te reo

Māori in academia as a method of asserting the mana of the language in this area. This paper will discuss the highs and lows of writing in te reo Māori for academic purposes.

## NGĀ HEKE

The authors have identified two problem areas that cause issues for writers and translators of te reo Māori. Firstly, there are wider societal difficulties and secondly, there is a limited pool of proficient te reo Māori writers.

One of the obvious barriers is that of the negative reception to te reo Māori. The authors have classified this response in people as “anti-reo humans” or those within the ‘Zero’ category of Rewi and Higgins ZePA model.<sup>12</sup> New Zealanders would be hard-pressed not to notice the negative reception towards Māori language and Māori translations. Anti-reo humans are particularly noticeable in public and social media. For example, Guyon Espiner, a well-known Pākehā journalist in New Zealand, has taken to learning te reo Māori and speaking it freely on his radio show. He has received very negative feedback speaking te reo Māori on air. He has quoted some of the negative comments in his recent article (including spelling mistakes):

*“RNZ. Gee. Listen to Guy Espona go with his Māori,” wrote one listener from Gisborne, butchering several languages at once. “Dose he come with a grass skirt and dance with a spare too? How long before you have to wear shoe polish on your face? Another listener from Rotorua said he had “no interest whatsoever in learning the Maori words for the days of the week or anything else”. He said RNZ was adding more Māori language “to annoy the hell out of its listeners” and concluded I [Espiner] was the worst offender. “As for Guyon Espiner’s 7am greetings, well that is just pompous exhibitionism.”<sup>13</sup>*

This is only a small example of some of the negative encounters people have in relation to te reo Māori, but highlights how advocates for te reo Māori are frequently faced with these barriers. The only way to combat this negativity is to continue on the pathway of elevating te reo Māori to be seen in all places and in all corners of Aotearoa and Te Wai Pounamu.

Another barrier is the lack of capacity, which includes the breadth of capable speakers, writers and translators. Although language revitalisation efforts have ensured that we have a growing pool of speakers, these speakers are not necessarily strongly proficient in every language domain. We note in our teaching of te reo Māori at the tertiary level, that a particular weakness is that of writing. There is a need to continue to develop the writing skills in good speakers of te reo Māori, honing their ability to write to a level of excellence and also in the many writing genres required. Beyond this, though, is that not all competent language speakers are in the academic world or have the desire to take it to that level.

There are translator and interpreter exams that individuals can sit in order to become official translators through Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (The Māori Language Commission).<sup>14</sup> In the authors' experience however, the demand for quality te reo Māori translators is not presently able to be met. The authors themselves experience a regular flow of translation requests from many different organisations and areas. In order for te reo Māori to be seen in various publications like that of a Māori Strategic Framework, or on signs at an institution, a more focused succession plan to build the capacity of speakers and writers of te reo Māori is needed.

Capacity also becomes an issue within tertiary institutions in relation to supervision and examination.<sup>15</sup> Although tertiary institutions provide opportunities for students and staff to produce work in te reo Māori,<sup>16</sup> more thought

and consideration is needed in regards to capacity. For students wanting to produce assignments in a subject that does not have a capable Māori language speaker, it can be difficult to ensure that the assignment will be marked adequately. For example, at the University of Otago less than six percent (approximately 60-70) of the University's academic staff are Māori.<sup>17</sup> Less than 20 of those would be confident enough to mark something written in te reo Māori, the bulk of which are based in Te Tumu: School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies. Furthermore, speakers may have excellent spoken, written and translation skills in te reo Māori but lack the qualifications required by the institution, or vice versa.

Another barrier to writing in te reo Māori is the lack of value placed on the work. Translation as an example is taxing and it can take many hours to translate English to Māori and vice versa, particularly if the English language is unusual or challenging. The fiscal return for this work is generally underestimated with very little understanding of the time it takes to write in te reo and translate.<sup>18</sup> Some of the other issues translators and writers of te reo encounter are discussed below.

## DIALECT

When writing in another dialect there is always an element of choice about particular language to use. An example with the Kāi Tahu language of the South Island is how the 'k' replaces the velar nasal 'ng'. Therefore, questions arise with particular words and whether to use the 'k' or otherwise, for example ngutu (lips) versus the use of the 'k' which will become kutu (this is generally translated in a standardised Māori language form as 'head lice'). Ultimately the choice lies with the translator or writer and who in-fact has commissioned the written work. Biggs writes about the choices translators and interpreters of te reo Māori have:

*I consider that although there is room for free translations in popular versions of legends, and traditions. ... yet in scientific publications the translation should conform as closely as possible to the sense of the original, sacrificing, if necessary, style to accuracy.<sup>19</sup>*

## KIA MĀORI TETUHI

One of the challenges of writing in te reo Māori as a second language learner is making all effort to write the language as authentically<sup>20</sup> Māori as possible, that is as close to the native language as one can get. From personal experience, as second language learners, this can be a demanding task, as we do not have the innate ability to connect with the language as if it is our first language. This is also prevalent when translating te reo Māori sentences as it is critical to maintain the essence of te reo Māori, to 'be Māori in thought and mind' and not simply be a literal translation. The most frequent translation requests require texts to be translated from English to Māori. This can cause several issues as they stem from different language families (English = West Germanic, Māori = Proto-Oceanic)<sup>21</sup> and are structurally diverse. An example of this is in the sentence: 'I am waiting for the bus'. A direct translation of this which is commonly used today and is often used incorrectly is 'Kei te tatari au mō te pahi'. 'Mō' has been taken from English as a direct transliteration for the word 'for', but in this context it is incorrect, as this actually translates as 'I am waiting about the bus'. In order to translate this authentically it needs to be written as 'Kei te tatari au ki te pahi', as 'ki' is used with certain verbs, such as 'tatari' (to wait) to connect the action to an object.<sup>22</sup> Many common idioms and expressions in English do not directly translate into te reo Māori. For example, the following sentence was written in an Otago Polytechnic research publication<sup>23</sup> using the term 'twice as likely':

*"The study also found a bonus for the babies sleeping in wahakura: at six months of age they were 'twice as likely' as the babies in bassinets to be fully breastfed."*

## THE MĀORI TRANSLATION:

*"He hua anō hoki i puta i te rakahau mō kā pēpi e moe ana i kā wahakura: hei te pakeke ono marama, e rua whakarau te hua' mai o te whākote anake o kā pēpi wahakura i kā pēpi e moe ana i kā pouraka."*

Often the translation process involves researching the meaning of the English term in order to understand the context and most appropriate translation to articulate the expression. This was applicable for this example in that the term 'twice as likely'. Although in English the term flows better than 'double as likely' or the 'probability is doubled', the translations of any of these are difficult as it is not a familiar concept in conversational Māori language.

Lastly, as authors and translators, it is our opinion that it is important to be correct. There is no need to accept a language that is flawed today. There are many excellent Māori grammar reference books and experts to provide examples of sound te reo Māori.<sup>24</sup> There is no need to craft te reo Māori that is simply nonsensical. There is a myriad of te reo Māori sources and examples online, in books, with proficient kaiako and so forth.

## NGĀ PIKI

The positive aspects of translation and writing in te reo Māori are many. The Māori language, as an official language, should be afforded the mana that it deserves and be seen and published as a normalised language. It is astonishing that in 2019 we should be questioning the place of te reo Māori. Some of the positive features of translation and writing in te reo Māori will be discussed in this section of our paper:

## COINING NEW KUPU

Although the corpus of words and phrases have grown exponentially over the last thirty years and particularly with the work of the Māori Language Commission, there are new situations and creations that necessitate coinage. Therefore, when writing in te reo Māori there are some words and phrases that are simply not readily available in dictionaries or so forth. There is great satisfaction in coining new words in Māori that are more than transliterations. It is not merely the process of coining new words but also coming up with creative phrasing and ways of wording for very difficult Pākehā concepts, similar to 'twice as likely' as previously discussed. An example comes from Dr Leoni's PhD thesis. She found that there were many words that were not available in te reo, such as 'reoruatanga ā-whakanōhanga' (institutional bilingualism) or 'pūnaha tuhituhi' (orthography).<sup>25</sup>

## CONTRIBUTION TO DIALECT REVITALISATION

The Kāi Tahu language as an example here is an important one because the iwi has lost their native speakers, with the last one dying in December 2011.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, writing in the Kāi Tahu dialect, a dialect of te reo Māori, contributes to the overall language revitalisation process. To be able to write in a dialect that was dormant as a native spoken language for some years is empowering and important. The Otago Polytechnic have made a firm commitment to writing and publishing their official documents in the local Kāi Tahu dialect; that stance has taken tremendous courage and they are acknowledged for that by local mana whenua. There are many examples of this on the Otago Polytechnic website that include Māori Strategic Framework documents and so forth.<sup>27</sup>

## HE MAHI NGĀWARI

Academic writing in English is challenging. The writing and then the editing are demanding. However, writing in Māori for the authors has become a more pleasant and easier task than writing in English. The words and the structures flow and this are not a reflection on the simplicity of te reo Māori, but it is a response to the time, effort and practice in writing te reo Māori. It takes a commitment to become a proficient writer in a language that is a second language. However, the reward of writing an excellent piece of te reo Māori instils deep fulfillment on both a personal and professional level.

## CONCLUSION

Writing and translating in te reo Māori is a gratifying experience. It empowers the writer and assists in constantly honing their written skills. Translators and experts in written Māori language only become that with practice and diligence to the writing tasks. In a Māori language setting, we might choose to advise people “kia ū ki te kaupapa” - “be resolute in purpose”. That is, remain steadfast to what it is that is being done well in the space of Māori language writing and translation. First and foremost, writing in te reo Māori will champion the language, assist in elevating the language and then normalise the language in the ongoing crusade of Māori language revitalisation. Written and published te reo Māori is a visual tool that solidifies a strong identity within our Māori youth in academic and vocational learning institutions. Any New Zealand tertiary institution that promotes written te reo Māori in as many spaces as possible is working as a genuine partner and honouring the Treaty of Waitangi partnership. Placing value on the work that it takes to translate and produce quality writing in te reo Māori is in turn valuing the official status of the language and the effort and skill required. In providing a chance for Māori language to be translated, written and published, this also provides the opportunity to build the human capacity in this area. People with this particular skill and ability in te reo Māori are still unfortunately few and far between. However, we need to continue to provide platforms for people to sharpen their writing skills on Māori language writing opportunities and tasks. This is not always attainable as many writers are learning language along the way, however we have developed a capacity in skilled writers and translators. The dialectical differences of te reo Māori across Aotearoa are closely connected and we need to ensure that the language remains true to the language of our tūpuna. Finally, on an important note, written te reo Māori seen in all corners of our world will only enhance our communities, bringing effect to the vision of a truly bilingual nation.

**Megan Pōtiki** (Kāi Tahu) hails from the Ellison family of Ōtākou where she was raised. She is a Lecturer in Te Tumu: School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies at the University of Otago. Her areas of research interest are te reo Māori, language loss, and Kāi Tahu history and whakapapa with a focus on Ōtākou. Megan is writing her PhD on the death of the Māori language at Ōtākou. She is also involved in language revitalisation within her own whānau, hapū and iwi.

**Gianna Leoni** (Ngāti Kurī, Ngāi Takoto, Te Aupōuri) is a recently appointed Lecturer in Te Tumu: School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies at the University of Otago. She graduated with her PhD from the University in 2016. The PhD (written in te reo Māori) focused on the use of and attitudes towards te reo Māori in government departments. Gianna is a proud 'language avenger' whose research interests include sociolinguistics, te reo Māori

## ENDNOTES

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