

Nathan Albury  
PhD Student  
Te Tumu School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies  
University of Otago

Dear

## **Re: Submission on *Developing a New Māori Language Strategy***

I am pleased to offer a submission in the consultation process about *Developing a New Māori Language Strategy*.

I offer my submission from the perspective of an applied linguist. I am currently completing a PhD on language revitalisation that compares folk knowledge, attitudes and ideologies about te reo Māori revitalisation and the revitalisation of Sámi languages in Norway. I hold a Master of Arts (Linguistics) from the University of New England with a specialisation in language policy, and a Bachelor of Arts in Languages and Applied Linguistics from Griffith University.

Before I respond to some specific questions set out in the document, I would like to comment at a high level that the strategy seems at times vague or inconsistent. These overriding observations are that:

- New Zealand's language policy needs to be state-of-the-art. Unlike many other indigenous language revitalisation contexts, te reo Māori lives face-to-face with English: the most powerful language of globalisation, economy and culture that is responsible for the death of minority languages in many countries. This means that revitalising te reo Māori is significantly difficult and New Zealand's policy needs to be innovative, cutting-edge and brave. My impression is the consultation document is not sufficiently cognisant of this dynamic situation.
- Much of the discussion remains intangible. Māori language revitalisation is about te reo Māori being used. This means it is more than just bilingual signs, or working with whanau, or teaching the language. To be revitalised, it needs to be seen and heard. The plan should be much more targeted in proposing how and where te reo will be used, and why, and how government will achieve that.
- The document is not clear on what it, and the New Zealand government, sees language revitalisation to mean as a policy endeavour. This needs to be clearer. For example, what is language revitalisation, who wants it, and why? It is also unclear on what end goal the government and language revitalisation policy is seeking to achieve.
- The document is inconsistent in its dealings with non-Māori and is unclear on what role non-Māori have in the language revitalisation process.

Above all, I wish to make the comment that language policy will never succeed if it does not align with ideologies of the policy's audience (Lewis, 1981; Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2004). This means two things for the government: either it should introduce policies that it knows will be accepted by the polity, or it should work to change attitudes and ideologies before introducing policy initiatives that might, for example, not align with negative views on te reo Māori. This is imperative and financially sensible. For example, if whanau did not believe they are responsible for language revitalisation, programmes that target whanau will not be welcome. Instead, initial work should seek to intervene in these ideologies at a conceptual level, or government should change its approach. As such, it is imperative that language revitalisation policy in New Zealand include a programme that seeks to better understand the ideologies, aspirations, and desires of the very people it is seeking to revitalise the language for. Key questions might include, for example:

- How important is language revitalisation to Māori communities, and what specifically are the views of youth who will carry the language forward?
- What role do Pākehā themselves want in language revitalisation, and what role would Māori like to afford them?
- What domains do people believe the language should be used, and why?
- Whose responsibility do the people believe language revitalisation is – do they see it first and foremost as a matter for families, for communities, for classrooms, for linguists, or for government?

The current consultation process is not enough to answer these questions. Those who offer submissions are highly motivated by the topic, have access to resources to make a submission, and cannot be deemed representative of the New Zealand population generally. I encourage the research agenda to include work on identifying language ideologies, and I am happy to offer findings from my PhD project as they come to light.

### **Key results**

It is unclear in result a) why *and other New Zealanders* are bracketed. Does this mean that non-Māori are a lower priority in language revitalisation? If so, what is the rationale for this and to what extent are non-Māori a lower priority? Also, in practice, what would a lower priority mean?

Results areas b) and d) are, actually one and the same. Status planning in language policy refers to expanding the domains in which language is used. In this regard, it would be more helpful for the strategy to identify the domains it is specifically seeking to introduce or elevate the use of te reo Māori, and the strategy should set out a concrete action plan on how it will achieve this.

I suspect that b) refers to prestige planning (Ager, 2005). This refers to interventions to raise the image of a language, and to introduce it into language domains of higher echelons, such as in the professions or as a language of culture.

The results areas need to be strengthened with information about how these will be achieved. How would the status/image of the language be improved? In my view, and in the view of much of the sociolinguistics scholarships, languages become valuable when they offer an advantage, such as when a language has a large number of speakers or provides access to markets (De Swaan, 2001). Te reo Māori does not provide these same advantages that could motivate language acquisition. As we have seen, the advantage of cultural memory and heritage is in itself not enough to motivate acquisition of te reo Māori: despite increases in the number of people who identify as ethnically Māori, te reo Māori proficiency is shrinking again. As such, a new incentive is needed and government should consider what that incentive should be. Personally, I believe proficiency in te reo Māori should be made economically sensible: public service agencies could increase salaries to those proficient in and use to reo Māori in public organisations. University, Polytech and Wānanga papers in te reo Māori could be subsidised. Businesses could be subsidised to train staff in te reo Māori similar to current ESL and literacy and numeracy programmes. Policy makers need to think about this.

It is unclear what the *quality of language use* means. This is, however, a very difficult issue. In the revitalisation process, it is imperative not to inadvertently introduce ideas of linguistic purism or high expectations for high proficiency, if an objective is to encourage learning and incipient bilingualism. Unfortunately, the consequence of high expectation and low proficiency is learners avoiding the indigenous language and feelings of shame or betrayal, or even criticism, as has been experienced in New Zealand (Chrisp, 2005). It is also important to recognise that languages evolve and are dynamic, especially languages undergoing revitalisation. In this sense, policy should not discourage hybridity and language change to the detriment of language revival. Here, I refer you to Zuckermann and Walsh (2011) for discussions that revitalisation can actually be assisted by acknowledging and embracing language change and the influence of English on indigenous languages.

The discussion on developing targets does not appear to align with the four results areas. The targets should aim higher, should be concrete, and should be much more specific. It is a shame the targets have not been included in this document, as it is the targets that will shape the strategy and should actually inform the work plans. I believe this is a missed opportunity, and runs the risk that te reo Māori language policy will be unguided and sporadic, with targets being established by policy rather than the other way around.

### **Target audiences**

The current Māori language strategy only requires 'goodwill' from non-Māori towards te reo Māori. This is not good enough.

My strong view is that non-Māori should be expected to play a much more prominent role in language revitalisation. Our laws have made te reo Māori an official language on par with English. Te Taura Whiri explains that language revitalisation includes achieving a bilingual

nation, that public service agencies are expected to operate bilingually, and expanding the pool of speakers. Te Taura Whiri also mentions the role te reo Māori plays in forging a national identity. These objectives and ideas are meaningless, even tokenistic, without an increased focus on non-Māori in Māori language revitalisation.

The longer non-Māori – the majority of New Zealanders - are exempted from te reo Māori language policy, the more te reo Māori remains at the margins, un-normalised, and in a struggle against the prestige of English. What is more, this marginalisation will not have benign consequences on the Māori population itself: language shift to the majority or more prestigious language is (regrettably) normal (Baker, 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This is exactly why the Māori Language Strategy exists, but this will continue if non-Māori are not part of the revitalisation process. Government should demand a greater commitment from wider New Zealand and te reo Māori should be seen as a responsibility, and privilege to all New Zealanders in contemporary New Zealand. This, as a matter of principle, should be the government's starting point. Reluctance to take this step can only be interpreted as latent prejudice against Māori and the Māori language.

I also believe the target audience need not be stratified by ethnicity, but should be targeted in different ways. The clarification of ideologies I set out at the beginning of this document would assist to better understand where, and with whom, language policy should be focussed. In my view, the focus on whanau may be futile. We are, in effect, hoping parents will use te reo Māori in the homes to instil intergeneration language transmission. This is a tall order, and a very hard task, for parents who do not speak te reo Māori as a first language. The language most comfortable used between parents and children is the language that the parents are at home in themselves, the ones they feel and can express love in, and the language that is spontaneous and creative. This may not be te reo Māori. Indeed, parenting in a second language can have dire consequences on family psychologies and may feel, ultimately, unnatural (Kouritzin, 2000). Please also see my comments under key initiatives. A target cohort may also be children at schools, for example, to help improve attitudes to the language. Another focus may be the professions and employers, with the view to instilling fiscal benefits to te reo Māori language proficiency. Another target cohort may be, for example, geographic areas of New Zealand where attitudes are less favourable to revitalisation.

## **Principles**

The principles do not appear to align with the results. The principles should also include a broader policy vision about the nature and ideal role of te reo Māori in New Zealand, such as whether this is a policy for Māori only or for all New Zealanders in the interests of biculturalism. It should also set obligations under law to protect te reo Māori, and the rationale for it. I also believe interdepartmental coordination and alignment should be a principle. This is because many agencies overtly or covertly are involved in language policy and different directions run the risk of sporadic and uncoordinated policy approaches.

## Key initiatives

I believe we need to question why whanau and intergenerational language transmission is regarded as a fundamental ingredient to language vitality. This was proposed by Fishman (1991) as necessary in language revitalisation but is being increasingly questioned. Romaine (2006) for example explains that the complexity and diversity of language revitalisation situations means “it is not entirely clear what conditions best support the survival and maintenance of linguistic diversity, and how these might be brought about where they do not currently exist” (p. 442). She refers to the examples of Welsh, Basque, and Irish: without a doubt these languages are becoming increasingly vital and are integral to their communities. Revitalisation, however, has not taken place primarily in family homes, but in classrooms. The languages have, nonetheless expanded in domain – to include public office – as well as in number of speakers. This has occurred, and continues to occur, without children growing up speaking the indigenous language natively, but acquiring it as a second language. This means revitalisation has occurred without intergenerational language transmission. In the situations of Welsh, Basque and Irish, it appears that the interests in indigenous language revitalisation is not necessarily to bring the languages to a state where they are a means of daily communication, but to fulfil some other purpose. In terms of the Māori Language Strategy, it remains unclear exactly what language revitalisation is meant to achieve, and what the polity itself wants from te reo Māori. It is therefore very important to clarify this immediately, because as has been overseas, “the main value of many small languages in the future may well be symbolic and cultural rather than practical” (Romaine, 2006, p. 465).

Classrooms are of course key actors in language revitalisation. Classrooms were the focus of eradicating te reo Māori, and became the focus for revitalising it. This deserves clearer focus in the strategy. In this respect, there needs to be an immediate discussion about te reo Māori as a compulsory subject in the New Zealand curriculum for all New Zealanders. Te reo Māori needs to be treated in the same way that English is treated, which is equally an official language in New Zealand. Overseas examples are proof that several languages can be taught to a high proficiency in schools without jeopardising education in other disciplines. See for example curricula in Norway, Iceland, Canada, Finland and Singapore. If te reo Māori is to be treated less favourably than English, despite the policy impetus for revitalisation and our laws, then the government owes the nation a clear explanation of why this is so. Furthermore, bilingualism is beneficial to cognitive more development, with emerging evidence that bilingual children are advanced in lateral and creative thinking (Baker, 2011) meaning te reo Māori education is not only responsible, but advantageous for non-linguistic reasons.

What is emanating by *expanding* existing programme of support under Mā te Reo? How is the expansion envisaged?

As already mentioned, the research fund should focus as a priority on understanding the ideas, ideologies and desires of the policy audience. This will help to better inform policy interventions.

I have concerns about the connection between the strategy's focus on dialectal maintenance and the initiative to develop and implement orthographic standards, lexicon etc. I agree that dialectal maintenance is advantageous – these are important to regional histories and relationships. However, how will these be reconciled with work to standardise the language when, conceivably, each dialectal will propose its own standard? Choosing one dialect over the others will by default stratify the *authenticity* of te reo Māori varieties to the advantage of only one dialect and to the disadvantage of the others.

Bilingual signage is a tokenistic policy gesture, and, in my view, condescending if it is discussed as a policy initiative in itself. These mean little in practice. What is more pressing, however, is the implementation of language plans in the public sector. Public services agencies are reportedly on a pathway to bilingualism, however these remain firmly English-centric. Indeed, in my several years in Wellington public organisations, an opportunity never arose to learn te reo Māori. It is imperative that government fix this situation. Language plans need to be developed and implemented with the service of linguists and agencies must be made accountable to meet the plans' targets.

## Conclusion

In summary, I believe we can do more than we have to date, and more than what is proposed in your document. It is time to demand a greater commitment to te reo Māori from wider New Zealand. It is time to become more specific in the policy initiatives about who they target, and why, backed up with well-founded evidence about the attitudes and ideologies of New Zealanders. It is time to pinpoint concrete targets that are measurable and tangible, such as where and when te reo Māori will be used, and to make public agencies accountable in achieving bilingualism. It is time to be brave and take the next step.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. I can be contacted by email should you wish to discuss any of these ideas further.

Warm regards

Nathan Albury

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