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What's in a Word

Words are the foundation of any language. They are the cornerstone of communication and can be conveyed in many forms, with the fundamental forms being either oral or written. This journey provides the reconnection to the ancient world of oral tradition, which in turn, provides a vital link to an ornate and poetic, indigenous language. This paper informs my doctoral research; with the emphasis being Māori oral traditions and the methodologies that advance the notion that oral history underpins and defines who we are, not only as individuals, but as the indigenous people of Aotearoa.

Oral Traditions

There are many forms of Māori oral tradition such as *whaikōrero* (oratory), *whakapapa* (genealogies), *paki waitara* (stories), *pepeha* (proverbs), and *waiata*, composition or song. As a research subject, a specific genre of Māori *waiata*, namely *mōteatea* or laments from the early nineteenth century, provide a template with which to analyse the language used, and its relevance in today's environment. Traditional languages change with the introduction of new technologies and environments. However, *mōteatea* have stayed intact and maintained their integrity as part of an oral tradition.

To that extent, this research aims to analyse how archaic language is defined and portrayed within modern composition, and whether the original meaning in reference to people, place and history is still understood. Within this context, specific *mōteatea* from my tribes of Te Arawa, Ngāti Awa and Tūhoe, and their words will be analysed in relation to their usage within both a traditional and modern context. As a vehicle of culture, language, and in this instance, *mōteatea*, play a pivotal role in the perpetuation of Māori epistemology through the telling of our stories in a musical form.

Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal (1992:20) highlights the integrity and validity of Māori knowledge and oral traditions in this statement 'Traditionally, Māori information and knowledge resided in the memories and minds of the people. It was not recorded in books or in any other such medium. Knowledge was passed down from parents and elders to children in informal and formal learning situations by vocal expression. Oral literature was recited continuously until it was carved into the house of the mind'.

With respect to the thought processes that occurred in the pursuit and retention of knowledge, Royal posits (1992:22):

Our ancestors conceptualised the mind (hinengaro) as having two parts: Memory, Te Puna Mahara; and Thought, Te Wānanga. These two parts were unified in spirit. As children, our ancestors learnt a great deal. As the child grew, he or she began to look into his/her memory to come to an understanding of the taonga [treasure] that had been placed there by the old people. The child began a journey towards understanding those taonga and further taonga yet to be learnt. The child had begun the process of Te Wānanga.

These histories provide the link to our ancestral origins, for it is from these origins that the art of oral tradition, and in this context, musical tradition derive from.

Matiaha Tiramōrehu of Ngāi Tahu, was an exponent of Māori traditions, and in 1849 provided us with his tribal creation story (Flintoff, 2004:12), 'Kei a te Pō te timatatanga o te waiatanga mai a te Atua. Ko te Ao mārama, ko te Ao tū roa'. This has been interpreted as 'It was in the night, that the Gods sang the world into existence. From the world of light, into the world of music.' Tiramōrehu further adds:

Creation began in Te Kore, the Void, after the two opposite but complementary elements, Hani (the Seeker) and Puna (the Well Spring), came together at the Sacred Altar. Then followed aeons of generations of Te Pō, the Darkness, which were matched by generations of Te Ao, the Light.

From the ages of Te Ao came our world's primal Sky Father, Ranginui e tū iho nei. From Te Pō came Papatūāenuku, the Earth Mother. Their names are often

abbreviated to Rangī and Papa. Both had families through earlier relationships, and several children of these stayed with Rangī and Papa and are known as their children. This extended family gave us most of the departmental gods of the Māori... Tānemahuta, the great procreator and God of the Forests, as well as birds; Tāwhirimātea, the God of the Winds; Whiro, feared as the one responsible for bad deeds and sickness; Tū Matauenga, the fierce God of War; and Rūaumoko, the unborn child who gets restless and moves within Papa, creating earthquakes.

All the different types of Māori song stem from the emotions displayed by the gods during the creation aeons. There are songs of sorrow, anger and lament; of loneliness, desire and joy; peace and love'.

This depth of thought is evident in the many *mōteatea* that now reside as a written record in such archives as Sir Āpirana Ngata's four volume collection of *Ngā Mōteatea*, the Journal of Polynesian Society and the Māori newspapers of the nineteenth century. The newspapers not only illustrate the high degree of Māori confidence in printing our own language, they are historical and cultural treasures that provide numerous examples of the development of Māori written literature.

Imagery within Composition

McRae (2011:7) describes the four volume collection of compositions by Sir Āpirana Ngata as being 'evidence of the ancient and historical Māori tradition of composition, as well as the conventions and skills of the composer poets'. She further adds that the collection 'contains some of the best examples of the traditional songs and many are complex in their language, imagery and allusions'.

These allusions within *mōteatea*, form visual symbols to extol the attributes and qualities of the deceased. Mitcalfe (1974:8) delves into that imagery:

Laments would usually open with a visual symbol—the shades of evening or a peak on the horizon—and from there move to the attributes of the dead one, of his family and, if he had died from natural causes, would wish him well on his journey to his ancestral resting place; but if death were in battle, or by treachery, or

even by so-called act of God, the song would call for *utu* (revenge) in the most specific form’.

Mitcalfe informs his notions of imagery from compositions such as this particular *mōteatea*, composed in the early 1800s for my ancestor Te Rama Apakura, and named ‘Te Whetū e te marama’. The first two lines ‘Te whetū e te marama, e ngā patatari o te rangi, ko Te Rama Apakura...’ translate to mean ‘The star (in this instance, Te Iritoa, the composer is making reference to Venus), the moon and the clouds in the sky, it is you Te Rama Apakura’. The *mōteatea* then goes on to say that, metaphorically, it was Te Rama Apakura who guided his people from the ancestral homeland of Hawaiiki. The *waiata* illustrates his leadership abilities and ancestral connections.

The preservation of *mōteatea*, such as Te Whetū e te Marama’ as an oral art form, has been the focus of many studies. The main questions being posed in this particular research study are:

- Are the meanings of specific phrases and key words within *mōteatea* still understood?
- If not, what changes have occurred with the usage of these phrases or words?
- What impact has the development of the language had on the modern interpretation of *mōteatea*?

Language Development

With regards to the development of the Māori language, Harlow (2007:34) argues that from a linguistic perspective, ‘important changes occurred in the vocabulary as a result of the migrations from tropical Island Polynesia to temperate New Zealand. Confronted with an environment containing features, flora and fauna not previously known, vocabulary adapted by a combination of neologism and semantic shift’. Harlow (2007:34) further adds that:

The next major event to have an influence on the vocabulary of Māori was contact with European languages. The first reliably recorded arrival of Europeans in New Zealand was the visit of the Dutchman Abel Tasman in 1642. However, it was not until after the visit of James Cook in 1769 that effective contact occurred through successions of whalers, sealers, missionaries, traders, settlers, and eventually

government officials. These contacts of course brought Māori and their language face to face with a huge range of goods, and cultural and religious ideas and practices which had been completely unknown previously. The language adapted in predictable ways to the new circumstances. Of course, borrowing from English (and, to a very small extent, other languages ...) played a major role'.

One *mōteatea* that illustrates the concept of borrowing from the English language was composed by Rangiamoa of Ngāti Apakura, one of the principal tribes of Waikato in the North Island. The first line of the *waiata* says '*E pā tō hau he wini raro*'. One translation of this phrase is 'the wind from the north touches me,' with the borrowed or loan word being *wini*, or wind. A few examples of the original word for wind are *hau*, *ōkiwa* and *matangi* (Moorfield, 2011:441).

Another *mōteatea* penned by renowned composer Mihikitekapua of the Tūhoe tribe, once again highlights the meeting of the two worlds and their languages when she states in the third and last verse '*He waka heera e rere atu rā*, which translates as 'a sailing ship passing by'. In this instance, the borrowed word is *heera*, or sail. Another word of interest, in the same verse, is *hēteri* which is a loan or borrowed word for sentry, whereas the original word is *tūtei* (Moorfield, 2011:30).

These brief examples provide an insight into the development of the language, and it is that type of development that is the focus of this study.

Methodology

The methodology underpinning this research stems from a traditional paradigm, with the underlying frameworks based on two models by Professor Tānia Ka'ai, firstly the native world view versus the Western world view (Ka'ai, 1995:24) and secondly, the Māori world view versus the Pākehā world view (Ka'ai, 2003). These two models have been used, not only to underpin the notion that Western ideologies are still prevalent within the Pākehā world, but also serve to highlight and contrast the development of the language of expression.

The traditional native world view encapsulates such notions as 'spirituality is embedded in all elements of the cosmos', 'human thought, feelings and words are inextricably bound to all other aspects of the universe' and 'time is circular with natural cycles that sustain life'. These notions clearly define the relationship between traditional landscapes and the

portrayal of the language in *mōteatea*. The creation story by Matiaha Tiramōrehu reinforces the notion that we are inextricably bound through genealogy to all elements of the cosmos.

Vansina (1985:xii), validates not only the importance of oral traditions, but the notion that time is circular in this statement, 'Yes, oral traditions are documents of *the present*, because they are told in the present. Yet they also embody a message from the past, so they are expressions of *the past* at the same time. They are the representation of the past in the present. One cannot deny either the past or the present in them'.

This view of the native world and the relationship between human thought, feelings and words and the inextricable bond to the universe is supported by Mitcalfe (1974:9) when he says:

Apart from personal attributes and actions, imagery in Maori song derived from personifying natural forces and phenomena. Imagery came from nature, from history, legend or human characteristics. Colloquialism, proverbs, commonplace or memorable utterances of the orators became part of Maori song, as did the more sacred symbols of Maori mythology. The ancestors, the stars, the sea, the land, the whole inanimate world seemed to gain human quality and meaning from accumulated centuries of human association, so that a certain peak, beach, waterfall, cloud, tree, fish, stone, bird or animal became talismanic, with a magical significance beyond itself.

Within Ka'ai's model, the Western world view differs drastically and espouses that 'spirituality is centered in a single Supreme Being,' that 'human thought, feelings and words are formed apart from the surrounding world,' and 'time is linear chronology of human progress'.

Ka'ai's second model (2003), Māori world view versus Pākehā world view challenges this notion of supremacy, stating that from a Māori world view 'identity and a sense of place is determined by linking traditional practices of the past with the present. The future is viewed as an extension of the past'.

This notion that there is an element of inseparability between people and their natural world, which is expressed through language, is reinforced by Ka'ai's view that 'the

landscape is understood from oral histories contained within the Māori language' whereas from the Pākehā world view 'landscape has been defined using western markers including literacy in the English language'.

These indigenous paradigms cement and highlight the relationship between Māori epistemology and its expression both from a traditional context, as well as highlighting the impacts of colonisation on oral narratives and the dissemination of the language.

Summary

These indigenous frameworks and the histories contained in this paper support and align to the research intent. They provide a backdrop for the analysis of the language and its development within traditional and contemporary *mōteatea*. They also reinforce the notion that oral history forces you to engage and live your history; it's a living memory, expressed in this instance through *mōteatea*, which are key repositories for the development of their language, and also the revitalisation of our language.

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