

Who do you think you are? Forms of address in the Wellington Corpus of Spoken English

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In addition to our given names, what we call ourselves and each other can say a lot about who we are, where we belong and what we do. The names which occur in large collections of spoken or written text produced by many individuals in a community can also reveal something of how that wider community sees itself. The *Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English* is a one-million-word collection of spoken texts of New Zealanders talking to and about each other in the early 1990s. This snapshot of spoken New Zealand English contains over 500 samples of transcribed speech, each sample containing about 2,000 words. The whole collection is intended to be a fairly representative sample from the total population. Three-quarters of the texts are of informal conversations, face-to-face or on the telephone.

References to individuals in the Wellington Corpus include many different personal names as well as terms of affection and abuse, and terms which name occupation, gender identity, religious affiliation, social position, level of skill (e.g. *non-expert*), or personal habits (e.g. *non-smoker*). There is also a strikingly diverse number of ways in the corpus by which the national, regional or ethnic identity of New Zealanders are referred to, and that is the focus of this note. The following table shows the number of times each of these terms is used in the corpus. The list is, of course, not exhaustive. It focuses on how the speakers in the texts, who clearly identify as New Zealanders, linguistically mark their ethnicity or background when talking with each other (e.g. I'm not an Asian, I'm a New Zealander). When words in the corpus such as *Asian* or *English* are not used to express identity in this way, they have not been included in the analysis.

Table: Occurrences in the corpus of certain terms used to refer to the ethnicity or national identity of New Zealanders

Asian	15	Chinese	5
Dutch	1	English	25
Englishman	3	European	16
foreigner	8	immigrant	5
indigenous people	4	Irish	7
Islander	7	Kiwi	86
local	119	Maori	705
migrant	2	minorities	1
newcomer	1	New Zealander	96
New Zealand born	3	old identity	1
Pacific Islander	5	Pakeha	92
Palagi	2	Pole	1
Polish	2	Polynesian	9
Pom	3	Pommy	1
Samoaan	2	Scot	1
Scots	4	Scotsman	4
Scottish	10	settler	9
tangata whenua	1	Tongan	1
Vietnamese	3		

NOTES:

1. The analysis is based on an alpha release version of the corpus.
2. A number of other terms which might have been expected to have occurred (e.g. *Antipodean*, *Cambodian*, *Caucasian*, *colonial*, *Cook Islander*, *homie*, *manuhiri*, *new New Zealander*, *new settler*, *non-European*, *NZer*, *Southeast Asian*, *tauivi*) were not found in the corpus.
3. At a regional level, only *Aucklander* (4), *Wellingtonian* (1) and *South Islander* (1) appear. The following are among the terms which do not occur in the corpus: *Cantabrian*, *Dunedinite*, *Mainlander*, *Stewart Islander*, *North Islander*, *Coaster*, *Westie*, *Taranakiite*, *Pig Islander*.

The use of some of these terms reveals certain tensions, uncertainties, ambiguities, transitional identities, or simply non-assimilation or non-integration. For example:

ASIAN (15)

The trouble about being Asian is that when I went to Hong Kong they expected you to be able to speak Chinese.

We need more Asians in this country.

I'm not an Asian - I'm a New Zealander.

CHINESE (5)

I know I'm Chinese, but going to China's a very different thing.

DUTCH (1)

Did you have French origins with your name? No, actually I'm Dutch.

ENGLISH

Occurs only 25 times to refer to an individual's background (e.g. My mother is English; on my father's side there was Ngati Awa). On the other hand, *English* refers to the language 177 times and to an academic subject 63 times (e.g. I'm doing six credits of English). *Englishman* occurs only three times.

EUROPEAN

29% of the occurrences have a strictly New Zealand context, e.g.

I'm a Pakeha New Zealand European of Irish ancestry.

That way the European could understand our treaty too.

I'm not a European - I'm not from Europe.

FOREIGNER (8)

I'm the only Kiwi - all the others are foreigners.

I was a foreigner when I tried to get back into the country.

IRISH (7)

I'm not an Irish woman. I'm a Kiwi, you see.

She's got Irish ancestry - you can't argue with her.

KIWI

Although the word *kiwi* occurs 98 times in the corpus, none applies to the live bird. Thirty-eight refer to people, 47 to sports teams (e.g. rugby league, basketball, gymnastics), five to the New Zealand dollar and seven to lottery tickets.

LOCAL (119)

Has both regional and national reference in the corpus, e.g.

They love it here, the locals (refers to a district).

They married local girls (refers to New Zealand).

MAORI

Occurs 902 times in the corpus. Seven hundred and five of the occurrences (77%) refer to ethnicity (e.g. He's a Maori actor). *Maori* occurs 197 times (22%) to refer to the language. Among the most frequent collocates are Maori people (73), Maori women (30), Maori men (11), Maori language (32), Maori land (17), Maori television (23).

NEW ZEALANDER

As Orsman shows, the term *New Zealander*, from the time of Cook's first voyage until the end of the 19th century, was typically used to refer to the tangata whenua. In the Wellington Corpus, it is not used in this way. However, a number of the 96 occurrences of New Zealander in the corpus are prefixed by particular collocates, e.g. ordinary, true, decent, real, tough, low income vulnerable, every, all, ex-, non-Maori. The term *New Zealand* occurs 837 times but only on 18 occasions (when in association with another word) does it refer to personal identity: -born (3), -captain (2), -child (3), -group (2), -male (1), -man (2), -woman (5).

NON-

25% of the occurrences of *non-* are used to define people in terms of what they are not: non-Maori programming, non-Ngati Toa people, non-Maori New Zealanders.

PAKEHA (92)

Is used in a variety of ways, e.g.

He was the most Pakeha-looking fella.

I'm a fifty-year-old Pakeha woman.

She just looks like a Pakeha.
nothing much more than brown-skinned Pakeha
Politics is Pakeha politics.

POLE (1)

She just came down on Poles, you know.

POLYNESIAN (9)

She got a real helping hand because she was Polynesian.
The vast majority are Polynesians, and not New Zealand-born.

POM (3)

We had some Poms that came to live next door.

SCOTS (4)

Those Scots farmers in Otago.
I had a Scots teacher at school.

SCOTSMAN (4)

When's that bloody Scotsman leaving the house?
He's not a real Scotsman.

SCOTTISH (10)

He knew all about his Scottish background.

SETTLERS (9)

Is used with two quite different referents, e.g.
the original settlers of Tuatapere, the Erskine family
The first settlers in New Zealand were the Maori people.

It is worth noting that while *New Zealand* (837) is the most frequent name used in the corpus for the political entity, *the/this/our country* has 362 occurrences, and *Aotearoa* has 18. *Godzone* does not occur. The pronouns *we*, *us*, *our(selves)* were not counted, although they occur frequently to express national identity (e.g. our exporters, our side, we lost).

A corpus, however representative, can only be a snapshot of kaleidoscopic social processes. From the examples shown here, it seems

clear that, in the salad bowl of national identity, New Zealanders have a number of options for talking about themselves. Some of these options focus on particular origins (and our attitudes to them), some are non-inclusive, and others suggest some semantic indeterminacy. Perhaps the speaker in the corpus who said “There’s no confusion in being both Maori and Pakeha” best expressed the potential of ambiguity.

WORKS CITED

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