

## Reflections on Lexical Borrowing and Code-switching in New Zealand English.

*John Macalister*

New Zealand English is most obviously marked from other varieties of English by its lexical borrowings from te reo Maori. Many of these words have become so much a part of the New Zealand English lexicon that their Maori origin is not consciously registered by their users. Such words – *kiwi*, *kumara* and *kauri* would be obvious examples – have been borrowed from Maori and fully integrated into English. These loan-words are generally obedient to English rules of phonology, morphology, and syntax.

There are other words, however, which may be present as examples of code-switching rather than borrowing. When describing the lexicon, linguists endeavour on occasion to differentiate between such words but, as Gordon and Deverson (69) have pointed out, ‘there is no well-defined line over which a word must pass before being counted as a permanent acquisition’.

The following discussion recognises that these lexical boundaries are indistinct, but suggests that, certainly for written language, significant information about a Maori word’s status within New Zealand English is revealed by its treatment in a text. While this treatment is determined by editorial policy, such policy is based upon knowledge of and assumptions about the reader. The two issues to be considered here are those of italicisation and of glossing.

This discussion draws illustrations from two corpora of the *School Journals*<sup>1</sup>, a publication for schools that has become a New Zealand icon since first publication in 1907. Although there has been some modification from time to time, the *Journal* has always been published in graded parts. The current structure ranges from Part 1, aimed at the 7 – 8 year age group, and published five times a year, to Part 4, aimed at 11 – 13 year olds, and published three times a year. The *Journal* is distributed free to all schools in New Zealand.

The two corpora from which illustrative examples are drawn were compiled to analyse changes in the use of Maori words in New Zealand English (Macalister, 1999, 2000). One corpus consists of the universe of *School Journals* published in a two year period in the late 1960s. The other corpus

---

<sup>1</sup> The creation of these corpora was made possible by the co-operation of the editorial staff of the *School Journals*. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the support, encouragement and involvement of Patricia Glensor.

consists of a similar universe for two years in the late 1990s. While the 1960s *Journals* were more obviously curriculum-driven than those of the 1990s, in both periods the *Journals* were designed both to inform and to entertain their target readership.

The fact that illustrative examples are drawn from two chronologically distinct corpora allows observations about changes in the status of words of Maori origin in the New Zealand English lexicon over that period to be made.

### *Italicisation to signal a foreign import*

The first issue is that of italicisation. One of the several accepted uses of italicisation in a text is to signal that a word or phrase is foreign. It does not, of course, follow that the word or phrase is necessarily thought to be unknown to the reader.

This practice of italicisation was widely employed in the *Journals* of the 1960s, particularly in the senior *Journals*. Maori words other than place and personal names, but including *pakeha* and words referring to flora and fauna, were usually italicised. The clear message to the reader, then, was that, while these words may be understood in the context of New Zealand, they are not English. There may even have been a subconscious rejection of the notion of a New Zealand variety of English.

In the 1990s corpus, by contrast, italicisation is more commonly used as a means of conveying emphasis on a word, as in 'We will *not!*'<sup>2</sup> than as a means of indicating foreignness. Indeed, this convention extends to lexical borrowings from languages other than Maori, as in the example 'Her father was a *matai*.'<sup>3</sup>

The changing practice of italicisation, therefore, suggests that words of Maori origin in general have now become an accepted part of written New Zealand English, although the use of macrons, when appropriate, continues to call attention to the foreign origin.

However, this changing practice by itself does no more than indicate acceptance. It may be simply an editorial decision for presentation or production reasons. The change does not necessarily carry the assumption that the Maori word will be more widely understood in the 1990s than it was in the 1960s. This leads to the second issue, that of glossing.

---

<sup>2</sup> Part Two, Number 1, 1998: 37

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*: 5. *Matai* in this sense is not recognised by Orsman (1997), although this is an example of lexical borrowing into New Zealand English from a non-European language other than Maori.

### *Glossing to aid understanding*

As was noted at the outset, it is the Maori component that most distinguishes New Zealand English. However, there is no question but that te reo Maori exists as a language in its own right. Thus, the difficulty in attempting to identify integrated lexical borrowings from Maori is in deciding when a Maori word is present as an accepted part of New Zealand English and when it is present as Maori language through code-switching. A consideration of glossing yields some insight.

At its simplest, a writer uses a gloss, or an editor appends a glossary, when it is assumed that a word's meaning will not be understood by readers.

A gloss can take a number of forms, and these include:

- a marginal gloss, where the meaning for a word presumed unknown is provided in the margin;
- an embedded gloss, where the meaning is embedded in the text, as in 'Te Ika a Maui, the North Island of New Zealand, ...'; in place of commas the meaning may be embedded between dashes ( - the North Island - ), or within parentheses, or signalled by the use of 'or';
- a tautological gloss, such as 'a piupiu skirt'; this is closely related to, but distinct from, an embedded gloss;
- a footnote gloss, where the meaning of an asterisked or otherwise marked word is provided at the foot of the page;
- an endnote gloss, the meaning of an asterisked or otherwise marked word is provided at the end of the passage;
- a glossary, where a list of unknown words and their meanings is provided, usually at the end, but occasionally at the beginning, of a passage or of a publication.

While it is generally supposed that a gloss is used when a word's meaning is assumed to be unknown, there are, in fact, a range of possible motivations for providing a gloss. These include:

- to make the meaning more transparent by giving a more familiar term, as in 'a famous *tohunga*, or priest ...'<sup>4</sup>;
- to assist the acceptance of a lexical borrowing;
- to remove the sense of foreignness (which may not necessarily make the meaning more transparent), as, for instance, '*toumatou*, or wild Irishman'<sup>5</sup>;
- to add "colour" (which could be called 'reverse glossing', as the glossed meaning is the unknown item). An example of this from the 1960s corpus is, 'three or four large canoes (called *tiwai*)'<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> Part Four, Number 3, 1967

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Part Four, Number 1, 1967

It could also be argued that glossing not only removes the sense of foreignness but may also act as a kind of cultural appropriation by lexical means. Such an argument is an extension of Pound's contention regarding nineteenth century landscape painting in New Zealand, that, in essence, to be made acceptable to European eyes the landscape had to be Europeanised. The "capturing" of landscape in sketches', he argued, was 'but the beginning of [the] act of possession' (44). Replace *landscape* with *birds* and *sketches* with *words*, and the idea is the same, as the following examples illustrate:

There are wekas and kakapos (the owl parrot) ...  
 ... the native New Zealand parrot, the kea ...  
 They [weka] are members of the Rail family.<sup>7</sup>

The introduction of English nouns cannot be defended on grounds of clarifying meaning. Rather, by insisting on a familiar/English identification of New Zealand birds, the alien/Maori element is eroded. The process is more than simply removing the sense of foreignness; it also acts to remove Maori "ownership".

#### *Changes in glossing practice*

Glossing of Maori words does occur in both corpora, although in the 1990s corpus the only uses are to clarify the meaning of a word that may be unknown and to assist the comprehension of a new lexical borrowing. Not only was the incidence of glossing far greater in the 1960s corpus, but the motivations were more diverse. A comparative study of words that were glossed for clarification of meaning in the 1960s with the treatment of the same words in the 1990s could be undertaken to determine which words have become an accepted part of the New Zealand English lexicon, but for the purposes of this paper the following observations about trends can be made:

- glossing was more common in the 1960s than the 1990s;
- glossing resulted from more motivations than simply clarifying meaning and assisting the acceptance of a new borrowing in the 1960s;
- proper nouns are almost never glossed in either corpus; the rare exceptions are geographical names;
- glossing of Maori words for flora and fauna was a relatively frequent occurrence in the 1960s; usually, as in the example '*toumatou*, or wild Irishman', this was because the plant being referred to was unlikely to be

---

<sup>7</sup> all examples from Part One, Number 2, 1968

commonly known, although in this case it is equally unlikely that the gloss assisted identification of the plant. Occasional instances of glossing Maori words for flora and fauna also occur in the 1990s corpus when the word is uncommon, for example, *takapu* and *harakeke*;

- glossing of words relating to Tikanga Maori and Maori material culture is apparent in both corpora, although, of the 16 words found to be exclusive to the 1990s corpus, only five were found to be glossed, once by an embedded gloss and four times by inclusion in a glossary.

When glossing is taken together with the use of italicisation, two generalisations can be made about the treatment of Maori words other than proper nouns in the *Journals* 1960s corpus: words of Maori origin were usually identified as foreign, and the meaning of words of Maori origin was often assumed to be unknown to the reader. These generalisations suggest a lack of ready acceptance of Maori words in the New Zealand English lexicon at that time.

By contrast, in the 1990s corpus, the trend is to accept words of Maori origin as an integral part of New Zealand English, and, although glossing still occurs, the usual assumption is that a word will be known to the reader.

### *Conclusion*

Italicisation and glossing are both textual features that provide important information about the status of a word or phrase from a foreign language within the borrowing language. These features tell us whether or not a word or phrase is regarded as foreign, and whether or not it is regarded as likely to be understood. Certainly, the absence of italicisation and glossing suggests that a loan-word has been fully embraced by the borrowing language.

Within New Zealand English, examination of these features in the late 1960s and the late 1990s suggests that words of Maori origin have become more generally accepted as part of the New Zealand English lexicon. They are less likely to be marked as foreign, either by italicisation or by glossing.

These changes over time suggest a continuing dialogue between te reo Maori and New Zealand English, resulting in the ongoing enrichment of the New Zealand English lexicon.

### *Works Cited:*

Gordon, Elizabeth and Tony Deverson. *New Zealand English and English in New Zealand*. Auckland: New House, 1998.

Macalister, John. Trends in New Zealand English: some observations on the presence of Maori words in the lexicon. *New Zealand English Journal* 13 (1999): 38 – 49

Macalister, John. The changing use of Maori words in New Zealand English. *New Zealand English Journal* 14 (2000): 41 - 47

Orsman, Harry (ed.). *The Dictionary of New Zealand English*. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Pound, Francis. *Frames on the Land: Early Landscape Painting in New Zealand*. Auckland: Collins, 1983.