

Ray Harlow. 2007. *Māori: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge. (xiv, 241).

This work, dedicated to the late Terry Crowley, well known for his work on Oceanic languages and contact varieties in the region, notably Bislama, the creole which serves as the national language of Vanuatu, and a friend of a great many, makes a welcome contribution to those interested in the Polynesian languages and to those interested in endangered languages and language preservation/revitalization efforts.

This book makes a significant contribution to the literature on Māori and Polynesian languages in particular and endangered languages in general, with chapters not only on the structural elements of the language, but on its literature, its history, variation in Māori, and the sociolinguistic situation of Māori, including preservation and revitalization efforts and its somewhat precarious status. An important part of the scholarship on any language, particularly an endangered minority tongue, is recognizing its situation historically and socially and appreciating its history and literature. The discussion of each subtopic is thoroughly annotated and documented with abundant up-to-date and traditional references for students who wish to pursue further details. Among these references are included those for such tangential topics as cultural institutions and traditional practices, such as the *marae* and the oral traditions that are maintained there (5, f).

The topic of orthography, which is slowly attracting interest for the social and linguistic phenomena involved in its design and practice, is addressed in Chapter 4, on phonetics and phonology. Māori is written in a script based on the roman alphabet; inconsistent practices have obtained, however, as in rendering phonemic long vowels, e.g., /a:/ with two graphemes, <aa> or by using the <ā>, as in the present text (88 – 92). That this material is included in this chapter

implicitly confirms that the system constitutes a shallow, i.e., phonetic orthography; such inconsistencies as are observed result from “impressionistic” spellings based on the English orthographic system (90).

Chapter 2, “A Brief History of Māori,” brings the nomenclature on classification up to date, placing Māori among the Central Eastern Polynesian branch of the Oceanic subgroup of the Malayo-Polynesian group of the Austronesian family on the basis of linguistic development and the evidence of the oral tradition, which, in every tribal group, attributes settlement of the islands by Polynesians to the “canoe tradition” (15). Primary sound changes in the Polynesian group are traced to demonstrate the remarkable outcome of an inventory of fifteen phonemes in Māori, including the reflexes of Proto-Polynesian /f/ in Māori, *f*, *h*, *w* (16), along with some apparent effects from English, as in a general preference for the aforementioned [f] among allophones and the advent of greater aspiration of /p, t, k/ (23). In addition, applicable historical developments are mentioned in the chapters on the structural elements, which give welcome depth to the treatment.

An important sociolinguistic phenomenon is noted in Ch. 3, that the Māori preserve dialectal features that index tribal connections, even if those features do not occur in their language surroundings, and that these serve as a “shibboleth” (43), and that such “shibboleth” features are “take[n] up and deliberately use[d]” by Māori learners, despite what they learn in school or in their environment (44). This phenomenon must be recognized by language planners and curriculum designers engaged in preservation/revitalization efforts, as “dialect loyalty” has proven consequential in efforts to normalize Māori (52).

A good deal of material in Ch. 7 “The Sociolinguistic Situation of Māori” focuses on the history of government and community originated policies regarding Māori and the status of

present revitalization efforts. The reported number of Māori speakers today, 160,000 (2), is greater than the estimated population of New Zealand in the eighteenth century, 100,000 to 110,000 (192), and much higher than the 70,000 reported in 1987 (Clark, 1987), although most speak it as a second language (2). Monolingual dictionaries now appear, which “free Māori from its dependence on English for its description” (216), a factor important for the integrity of the language. Noteworthy, too, are the results of a survey of attitudes undertaken in 2000, in which as many Māori respondents were “uninterested” in learning Māori and participating in Māori culture as non-Māori were “dismissive of Māori” and “negative” about its revitalization — both 12 % (207). On the other hand, the “vast majority” of residents of New Zealand saw the preservation of Māori as “desirable” (ibid.).

An important element of the revitalization program is corpus planning. If the language is to have enduring utilitarian value, vocabulary and nomenclature must be developed for technology and the professions. Given the broad knowledge of English and the ready availability of English items to fill these needs as loans or calques, this is no small matter, as is being seen with Malayan and Yoruban, among numerous others. The discussion (212, f) of the problems involved and the strategies being employed is comprehensive while also contributing to our understanding of how Māori creates new lexemes.

Ch. 4 “The Phonology of Māori” offers a very clear treatment of the topic. Perhaps the most slippery elements are the contrasts created by vowel length, e.g., [ku:ku:] ‘pigeon’ ~ [kuku] ‘mussel’ (66, f) (note also the aforementioned consequences for the orthographic system) and diphthongs, which are generally understood as “sequences of unlike short vowels” (69).

The author makes clear that a lexical word “can occur in a variety of syntactic environments” (97), and discusses further the essential categories of “bases” and “particles,”

which form the nuclei of phrases and which provide grammatical information at the periphery, respectively (99, f). Note the following example: *E ngaru aba te niaba* (TA wave TA Det. sea) ‘The sea is choppy’ (103). Since it is a combination of word order, particle participation, and pragmatics (in this case the emphasis given *ngaru* ‘wave’ in utterance-initial position contributing to its interpretation as predicate) that determine how an utterance is understood, the several pages of discussion (96 – 99) of proposed lexical categories for Māori may not be as useful to those without a background in the language.

A growing mass of literature on Māori is being accumulated, and probably the greatest difficulty in preparing a work such as the present volume is choosing what information not to include. The four and a half pages given to various theoretical approaches to problem of *a* and *o* marking of possessives (165 – 170) amount, for this reviewer, to four and a quarter pages too many in a brief introductory text.

The information that Māori follows VSx word order in unmarked utterances (150) comes early in Ch. 6 on syntax, but seems to come late in the text, since so much discussion of morphology has occurred in Ch. 5. In view of the above observation on the importance of word order and pragmatics, it is hard to talk about word formation, i.e., what is interpreted as predication, absent this principle. Likewise, creating distinct chapters for morphology and syntax suits the bottom-up arrangement theoretically, but distinguishes topics that from this perspective are in practice indistinct. Readers without a background in Polynesian languages may be better served by apprehending the details, not in isolation, but in the context of the whole utterance. Similarly, discussing regional variation (Ch. 3), with its often technical explication of phonemic and syntactic correspondences, might have profitably been held off until after the sections on structural elements.

These minor suggestions notwithstanding, this short text summarizes a great wealth of important information that help us appreciate not merely the structural elements of the language, but its history and variation, the communities that speak it, its role in the more general society, and as a result, important considerations in any language preservation and revitalization effort. As such the book serves as an excellent model for work on minority and endangered languages.

References

Clark, Ross. "Austronesian languages." In Comrie, Bernard, Ed. *The World's Major Languages*. New York: Oxford U P, 1987 (899-912).

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