

Reo o te Kāinga (Language of the Home)

A Ngāi Te Rangi Language Regeneration Project

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The home is the key domain where Te Reo Māori needs to be re-established as the main language of communication
—Te Matahauāriki o Tauranga Moana, 2006, p. 19.

This paper¹ presents the preliminary findings of a 12 month collaborative research project called Reo o te Kāinga (Language of the Home) that was conducted in the Western Bay of Plenty of New Zealand with nine Ngāi Te Rangi whānau (families). The research is a collaborative project where researchers and whānau members' work together to identify barriers and solutions associated with increasing speaking Māori language in the home. Four prominent themes that emerged in the research are discussed: 1) the influence of spiritual and traditional values, 2) whānau relationships and roles, 3) motivation, commitment and consistency and 4) the influence of image and social norms.

To understand the tribal context of Māori language re-generation for Ngāi Te Rangi, it is important to briefly explore the impact of colonization upon Māori people in Aotearoa New Zealand. Māori, like many indigenous people, have experienced the impact of colonization, assimilation and acculturation. As a people, we have also witnessed a significant decline in the number of fluent Māori language speakers. This decline has contributed to a Māori population where people are now less able and/or willing to carry the responsibility of language use to successive generations.

Māori language use and acquisition has been assisted by a number of initiatives. These include:

- The introduction of the Māori Language Act 1987 which aims to protect Māori language as a taonga (a treasured possession);
- The introduction of educational initiatives such as the Kōhanga Reo movement (pre-school), the Kura Kaupapa movement (primary school), Whare Kura (secondary school) and total immersion language programs at tertiary institutions (e.g., Te Tohu Paetahi, Te Ataurangi movement);
- The introduction of Māori radio stations which promote programs in Te Reo; and;
- The introduction of a Māori television channel which promotes several Māori language programs (e.g., Te Reo, Pukana).

These initiatives have not come about easily; in fact most of these infrastructural pillars of our Māori language system faced long painstaking challenges from

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governmental officials. As expected, language activists are continually seeking solutions to counteract the causative effects associated with the decline of the Māori language (Benton, 1979; Ka'ai, 2004). Government agencies are also taking on a greater level of responsibility to assist Māori language acquisition and use. The Māori Language Commission, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Māori Development are all contributing resources, though limited, to work alongside communities and tribes to reduce the ongoing decline of Māori language, customs and practices.

More recent accounts of the status of our language suggest that it is beginning to stabilize and language comprehension and understanding have improved (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2006, 2007; Karetū, 2001). But, there is also a contrasting picture emerging which suggests that our Māori language efforts are not progressing as well as we would like. Undoubtedly, institutions such as Te Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa are offering thousands of New Zealanders with an opportunity to learn Māori language at an introductory level. The *Ara Reo* (language path) course has had a profound impact on first time language learners.

Community language initiatives have surfaced throughout the country through the establishment of the *Mā Te Reo* program, currently offered by the Māori Language Commission and many Māori community groups are benefiting from these projects. The Ministry of Education *Community Based Language Initiative* has helped several tribes advance their own tribal aspirations for Māori language advancement. *Creative New Zealand* also provides funding to assist creative forms of language use and performance.

There is no question that these initiatives improve Māori language efforts, yet, the number of fluent Māori speakers aged between 40 to 70 years of age is not increasing at a fast enough pace to compensate for the loss of fluent speaking elders. Maybe, our focus on *holding a conversation in Māori language* has skewed the real picture of tribal language competency and fluency. We need only look at the dwindling number of koroua and kuia (elders) performing formal cultural duties on our marae (place of meeting) to confirm our suspicions regarding the current shortage of fluent language speakers. Maybe we can now confirm our hunches regarding the outcomes from investing only in institutional approaches to language regeneration. While we have pushed our children towards learning our language, we have failed to focus on one of the most important factors influencing language advancement – that language use is founded upon the ability of people to communicate amongst each other and if only one family member has language capability, they will find it hard to communicate with others who do not possess Māori language capability.

We most certainly are seeing the impact of this approach in many of our teenagers, who are the graduates of *kōhanga reo* (language nest). Our children possess the capability to converse in our language, yet many of them are actively resisting this role by rebelling against opportunities to lead language revitalization in their own homes. Who would blame them, when many of their parents have not shared the responsibility of language acquisition with them? Who were our children expected to speak Māori with when they returned home after school?

A long held vision to see our language flourishing and visible in ordinary everyday ways, has not reached a level of self-sustainability as might be expected. Instead, there is a real possibility that although initiatives to grow and nurture Māori language in Aotearoa New Zealand are in place; our language, like many other indigenous languages around the world, remains endangered (Benton, 1981; Orange, 1989).

One of the aims of our Reo o te Kāinga (Language of the Home) research project is to improve this situation within a Ngāi Te Rangi tribal context. Ngāi Te Rangi is an indigenous tribe of Māori descent from Tauranga Moana, New Zealand. Over the last twelve months we have sought to critically examine the reasons for our current language status whilst also working together to improve our situation. With the support of our tribal authority, we have drawn nine of our whānau (families) together to improve conversational Māori language within the home. This paper reports on our efforts by providing an overview of our recent language regeneration journey.

The Reo o te Kāinga project stemmed from the initial inquiries of a small group of Iwi members, interested in improving the well-being of our people through the use of our own language. Representatives of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Te Rangi, approached representatives of Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, a Māori tertiary institution to form a research partnership. Research funding was then sourced from the National Institute of Research Excellence for Māori Development and Advancement—Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga to resource our community action research project.

In Māori, the key research question is “ma te aha te whānau e whakaora ai i te reo korero Māori i te kainga?” meaning in what ways can whānau bring Māori language to life in the home? Further questions were posed to guide aspects of the project including:

- What are the current barriers to conversational language in your home?
- What are potential solutions to conversational language in your home?
- What roles do your family members perform with regards to conversational language in the home?
- What language roles are performed by your family members with regards to conversational language in the home?

These questions are necessary to navigate through the complexities associated with improving conversational language by families in the home. This is particularly the case when most family members possess different levels of language competency, which is complicated even further by psychological and emotional impediments to language adoption and use. In order to reveal the challenges associated with language acquisition in the home, further issues were explored including relationships between kin members of families, research sites and their influence on language acquisition, e.g., kāinga (home) and whānau and

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language leadership in the home and who fulfils this role. Home, family and the interaction between family members in the home through Māori language are identified as critical pillars of consideration for language survival. Fishman (1991) says, “whatever it is that other stages may and can accomplish insofar as RLS [Reversing Language Shift] is concerned, they are merely ‘buying time’ in the short run until a sound basis for long run intergenerational transmission can be established” (p.161). Genesee (1994) states that the “maintenance and development of the home language and culture are pedagogically sound and essential components of any effective educational program” (p. 1).

Similar language research projects in Aotearoa New Zealand

There are limited Māori language research publications and models that discuss the interconnection of language, with tribe, whānau and home in Aotearoa New Zealand. We have identified two projects thus far. One is Kōtahi Mano Kaika—Kōtahi Mano Wawata (1,000 Homes—1,000 Aspirations) launched in 2001. It is a 25 year strategy launched by Ngāi Tahu, the biggest tribe in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. A target of 1,000 homes (1,000 Ngāi Tahu families) was identified as a basis from which to work towards re-establishing Māori language within their homes. Ngāi Tahu’s aspirations were based on the crucial need to improve a dire situation. In 2000 native speakers of Ngāi Tahu descent made up ‘less than 1%’ of their tribal population (O’Regan, 2001). Whilst their project is not referred to as research, it reflects a proactive philosophical approach to tribal language recovery that emphasizes *language through action* using inter-generational language transmission amongst, and with whānau, as a core theme of language recovery by Ngāi Tahu.

The second project is Kāinga Kōrerorero, which aims to re-instill language through family interaction in the home. This project was developed by Te Ataarangi Incorporated and Te Puni Kōkiri (Ministry of Māori Development). Te Ataarangi is a national body championing Māori language learning programs throughout the country and Te Puni Kōkiri is a large government agency which focuses on Māori development. Kāinga Kōrerorero is facilitated through a network of mentors who offer advice, resources and support for language development by families in the home. This three year program is sustained by resourcing from Te Puni Kōkiri. It is a national program operating in nine locations throughout the country. In each of the locations, up to ten families participate in the program.

Reo o te Kāinga reflects similar project aspirations to the Kōtahi Mano Kaika—Kōtahi Mano Wawata and Kāinga Kōrerorero projects. At a fundamental level there is little difference between the projects. Obvious characteristics such as scale, resources, location and project focus (e.g., strategic plan versus research) do not detract from the end result for all of the projects, which is to improve intergenerational language transmission and use by family members within the home. We have adopted a research paradigm and we are able to employ research terminologies as required. We can do that, and we do. But, does that matter if language change and growth is not taking place? Perhaps then, the most prominent differentiating factor of this project from others is expressed

through the statement—*it is simply our project*—as Timoti Karetū, the first Māori Language Commissioner, has so eloquently put it: “we our are languages, and our languages are us” (2002, p. 29).

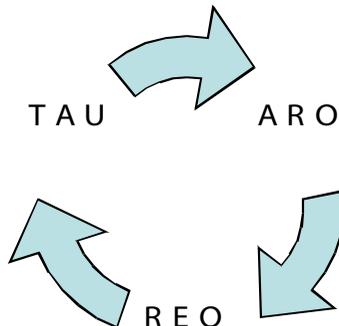
We, meaning Ngāi Te Rangi, are interconnected to, and with this project in every conceivable way: The research manager, research director, project leader, and researchers are all Ngāi Te Rangi. The tribe is Ngāi Te Rangi, the research project was conceived by Ngāi Te Rangi, the families are Ngāi Te Rangi, the language aspirations are for Ngāi Te Rangi, and the benefactors are Ngāi Te Rangi. Our ownership of this project and its outcomes is hugely significant. For without this sense of ownership, we would not be as passionate about its outcomes. This is not to say that we expect that every Ngāi Te Rangi member will equally associate themselves with this passion for language recovery and sustenance. Instead, we assert that the work we are doing with our nine families has not only advanced our passion for language in the home, it has also contributed to the building of a research infrastructure that incorporates Ngāi Te Rangi people at every different level. We are therefore convinced that we will make advancements that benefit our whānau, our researchers and our tribe.

Research methods

Very few research publications or models appear to focus on the home as a site for proactive dedication to regenerate language use within the home. The complexities associated with finding a balance with instructed learning, mentoring, inter-whānau language interaction, proactive personalized language activities, whilst also recognizing barriers to language learning through psychological impediments such as embarrassment, shame, ridicule, anger and fear require considerable thought in terms of model appropriateness.

For this project, we have adopted a simple, yet practical, tool called ARO-REO-TAU, which employs principles of action research to assist with the contextualization of tribal efforts to acquire language through interaction with several tribal families. This model was developed during this project. It has helped structure and organise the way we have worked with our whānau members (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Reo o te Kāinga project model



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Through home visits, phone calls, informal visits, wānanga and other forms of support (e.g., school support, one-on-one support, grammar lessons and accessing other networks and resources in Māori language), language growth and acquisition were enabled. The components of the model include:

- ARO—an abbreviation of two Māori words, ARONGA and ARO-TAKE. It is literally translated to mean ‘focusing point and evaluation’;
- REO—the Māori word for ‘language’ and;
- TAU—an abbreviation for the Māori word, TAUTOKO, meaning ‘support,’ as with the above examples.

At fortnightly or monthly intervals, home visits were initiated with an ARO meeting comprising of goal setting and resource preparation. As a follow up, REO meetings provided opportunities for participants to speak Te Reo Māori, in language reflecting their ability. Audio samples were also taken during these meetings which were spoken about at length in the following month’s meeting. This approach was part of the evaluation and reassessment process for goals relating to the forthcoming month. Wānanga were also held throughout the program to provide an opportunity for whānau members to come together. Two wānanga were held during the twelve month program.

Research methodologies adopted in this project reflect community action research protocols and Kaupapa Māori research methodologies. The overlay of ontological references to things Māori with definitive action oriented approaches to research ensured that the research principles guiding this project were consistent with our own beliefs and values. The research methods utilized in this project include a literature review, kāinga visits (home visits), whānau observations, language recordings, evaluation questionnaires and interactive whānau conversations.

Preliminary research findings

The preliminary research findings stem primarily from observational extracts and language recordings. Four prominent themes have emerged which relate to spiritual and traditional values, whānau relationships and roles, motivation and commitment, and image and social norms. These themes are by no means exhaustive; however they provide a snapshot of the experiences of our Ngāi Te Rangi whānau as they journey to improve conversational language within their homes.

The first theme, the influence of *spiritual and traditional values*, explores the behavior of people, their culture, and how values influence the way in which people interact in their natural environments. Our whānau participants drew from cultural values founded on a Māori world view. Our stories, narratives and history are intertwined with and to our language. Particular values, such as moral values, respect for one’s elders and service to others is of utmost importance (Bevan-Brown, 1996; Mutu, 2007; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2003). Whānau responses

demonstrate how the influence of values on language acquisition takes place, for instance:

Ben in particular feels a heartfelt obligation and honour to represent his sub-tribe by building his language capacity to 'sit on the pae' (a formal panel of speakers). He noted how he wished his grandfather was still alive, so he may speak and learn from him through Te Reo Māori.

The girls both pledged their support of the project by opting to be a leading example for Mum and Dad. Faye (the most fluent of the family) states "Mum will talk Māori to me, and I know it's not right. I know what she's trying to say, but I don't fix it." After asking why, she affirms, "I don't want to offend her."

Rana and Keri wrote their own karakia (prayer) for the morning and the evening that was relevant to their needs and desire for well-being. After I translated this into Te Reo Māori, they are both trying to learn it though rote memory. They take their karakia with them whenever they come into town for the night, or travel away. The karakia time has also been a bonding time, for the whānau, to help them get through a struggling period of Rana's illness, as well as keeping them focused in a Māori context.

Values that are reflected in these responses include an obligation to perform oratory duties for your family, respect for your elders and karakia (prayer) as a way of life to acknowledge our spiritual guides.

The second theme, the influence of *whānau relationships and roles*, recognizes roles performed by whānau members in a traditional social sense, and in the context of language acquisition. The whānau responses provided below are examples of how language roles are different to traditional family roles, for example:

Tom has a high degree of fluency and understanding in the Māori language, but he has a tendency to change into English if he thinks the person he's talking to doesn't understand. His wife states that whilst she may not understand him quickly, she actually wants him to carry on, so that she can at least have a go.

The more fluent speakers in the family acknowledged that there was one among them that was quite further ahead in her language skill than the rest, but also mentioned that she tended to correct them all the time, or get frustrated with them. This affected their confidence in speaking"

Upon further discussion around 'laziness' it was evident that this was really a case of changing into English to suit the 'listener' and simply becoming hoha (frustrated) when they are not understood"

I prefer to speak Māori, (but) I felt funny to speak Māori here.

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During the research a small number of whānau members chose to participate in a national week-long full immersion language course and many of them are also involved in other tertiary level Māori language programs. These whānau members have taken on the initiative to lead the revitalization of language in their home and community and these responses reflect their experiences:

Nadia has been very active in the home since she returned home from the Kura Reo. She has initiated their own meetings and games, to practice their language patterns and answer questions of those particular structures.

Taare is currently composing a haka (war dance) for the marae. Taare is taking an interest in composing, as it shows me that he is confident in his language skill and ability. He is also composing a song for the local school.

The third theme, *motivation, commitment and consistency*, relates directly to the success and participation of whānau learning Māori language on the whole. Te Puni Kōkiri (2001) reports, “motivation to learn and use Māori language is critical to Māori intergenerational transmission; Māori adults must want to speak Māori and transmit it to future generations (p.4). Most evident from the responses is the sheer effort required to remain motivated to learn your own language, the added dynamic of family relationships adds to the difficulties, for instance:

Emma shared her frustrations about a recent visit from her sisters, who blatantly spoke English, despite the fact that they knew about the whānau involvement in the Reo o te Kāinga project

The whānau have acknowledged that their efforts in terms of Te Reo Māori in the home (in particular the rāhui) have been minimal in recent weeks. They put this down to and largely in part to do with the fact that it is school holiday time, and as a family, they haven't spent much 'together' time over this period.

I've got too many things on, I'm far too busy. It's like we've forgotten, it's not a priority.

The final theme, the influence of *image and social norms* reflects the impact of what others think about Māori language and how their views impact language acquisition. This theme also reflects upon social norms and how they impact upon Māori language acquisition. The most prevalent finding so far, is that children often have the ability to speak Māori, but they resist participating in activities that appear to benefit their parents more than themselves, for instance:

Both parents have issues with being corrected by certain members in the whānau, who do so in such a way that is de-meaning and unhelpful. Such behavior has been a barrier for both parents, who feel that their

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younger son is doing this for reasons that are connected to the notion of image, and not looking or sounding right to other people.

We (the kids) never had to (speak) before and I'm just not used to it.

Tom was unsupportive of his father when it came to speaking, especially in public.

There's just no support from my son.

When asked about the fluency at Kura, he says that he speaks often because "they have to."

Conversely, parents and older adults in the family portray different issues. For instance, an overwhelming 'need' to be grammatically correct prevents language use, so much so that language correctness and confidence were viewed as major barriers for all whānau in this project, for example:

Heeni admits that she gets very anxious before ringing other people—and has also confessed that she hasn't yet called her hoa kōrero (speaking buddy) on the phone for this very reason...she knows that the hoa kōrero concept is to increase confidence to speak one to another. With only a two minute time-frame this proved too much for Heeni at this time.

(I'm) too frightened to say something wrong—I don't wanna get it wrong and look like an idiot.

I must say it right, the structure should be correct, I wanna make sense.

I am pedantic, that's just how I am. I look for fault. I have an ear for 'incorrect grammar' and it is better to be corrected in house than outside.

Oro is still grappling with confidence issues and not wanting to sound wrong, she comments that, "I use the reo with my moko's (grand-children) cos' they won't know if my grammar is right or wrong."

I want to be a Māori, the whole package (and) I can't be the full package without Te Reo.

I don't like listening to myself. I'm going too fast, I can't hear that.

These excerpts provide commentary about the experiences of whānau members involved in this project. An overall summation of their experiences to date is that language acquisition and use by individuals is much easier to achieve than language acquisition and use by several whānau members within a home at the same time. Some of the issues impacting whānau members include the four themes explored in this paper. Other issues such as power dynamics in internal whānau relationships, language learning preferences and language structures, emerge as significant factors associated with language acquisition in the home. It is likely that more issues will emerge in the final research report. Whilst these findings are preliminary in nature, they provide insight into some of the real and complex issues associated with re-growing a language within the contextual and structural domain of whānau within the home.

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Complementary tribal activities

Reo o te Kāinga is one major tribal project, however Ngāi Te Rangi is also planning other language revitalization activities which complement existing sub-tribe, institutional, regional and national efforts to improve our language. These community initiatives include the following:

- *Te Rautaki Reo Māori a Ngāi Te Rangi* (Māori language plan): Funded by the Māori Language Commission, we hope to develop a five year tribal language strategy next year.
- *Kura Reo a Rohe* (total immersion school of learning for the region): This five day language immersion program is a method of language acquisition that tribes are modeling from the national Kura Reo hosted by the Māori Language Commission. It is proposed that Ngati Ranginui, another Iwi within Tauranga will spearhead the Kura Reo for 2008, in partnership with our tribe and Ngati Pukenga.
- *Maungatūhāhā* (advanced learning by fluent speakers): This is a twelve month program aimed at providing succession planning for the next tier of formal language speakers in the Tauranga region. It aims to replicate language excellence by providing identified tribal people with an opportunity to participate in a five wānanga program throughout the year. Ngāi Te Rangi is managing this project for tribes in the Tauranga Moana region.
- *Te Heke o Te Rangihouhiri* (historical journey of the people of Rangihouhiri): In March 2009, the fifth re-tracing of the historical trail that brought the Ngāi Te Rangi tribe from the East Coast of the North Island to Tauranga will be held. Four previous trails have been undertaken since 1989.

It is important that our tribal leaders employ a strategic approach to facilitate language opportunities for our people. These community initiatives complement institutional options currently being offered to improve our language. The provision of community language initiatives has not always been easy, as resources are limited. Ngāi Te Rangi has employed a full time language facilitator and the responsibilities of this person are significant. As part of our language endeavors, the long term retention of this employee is crucial to the success of our tribal language recovery.

Conclusion

Our Reo o te Kāinga project has given us a privileged snapshot of the journey taken by a small number of Ngāi Te Rangi families to improve intergenerational language transmission and conversational language use within their homes. We have uncovered challenges and successes which have revealed promising pathways forward for our tribe. We have no doubt that the first hurdle to overcome is to re-confirm a tribal commitment to nourish and grow our language. As obvious as that first step might sound, there are many tribal members who do

not possess the ability to converse in our language, and even more concerning is the realization that many of our tribal members do not see a need to contribute to the survival of our language.

We are convinced that language use in the home can only be accomplished by family members interacting with each other; one person learning our language in isolation from the rest of their family members does little to assist intergenerational language transmission as no language family exists. If we can impress one main point in our paper, it is that a gauge of language wellbeing can be made from its use in the home. The *language roles* performed by children, parents and grandparents are also crucial and one of the most important language roles in the family is the *language instigator*; this person does not necessarily need to be a parent. The targeted use of the limited resources to improve language use in the home is also imperative. These resources need not always be financial; the active presence of a grandparent speaking to other whānau members in their own language is much more precious than any amount of funds.

We have more to do to complete our final research report. Nonetheless, we have presented these preliminary findings as a means to share emerging results as they materialize. The *sharing of knowledge* is one way in which principles of action research are adhered to. We also have no doubt that the nine family case studies that will be developed as part of this research will form the basis of a family oriented language revitalization paradigm for our tribe. We are looking forward to the insights that will be gleaned as a result. We also acknowledge our families as the sharing of their experiences would not have been possible without their support. In closing, we modify Professor Timoti Karetū's (2002) sentiments: *Fighters of language survival within the whānau and the home, we salute all your whānau!*

Note

¹This paper is jointly submitted by representatives of Te Runanga o Ngāi Te Rangi, the tribal authority of the Ngāi Te Rangi tribe, located in Mt. Maunganui, New Zealand and Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi, a Māori tertiary educational institution located in Whakatane, New Zealand. Funding for this project was made possible through Nga Pae o te Maramatanga, the National Institute of Māori Excellence in Research.

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