

SURVEY OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS, AND BELIEFS AND VALUES ABOUT, THE MĀORI LANGUAGE

SETTING THE SCENE

From the early 1970s, concerns have been expressed about the health of the Māori language, and its prospects for long-term survival as a living language. These concerns spurred Māori groups and communities to develop a range of initiatives to revitalise the language. Government has responded to these efforts with funding, policies and programmes over the years designed to support Māori aspirations for the language.

RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Accurate and up-to-date information is required to inform decision-making by Māori and government about future directions for the revitalisation of Māori. Te Puni Kōkiri established a Māori Language Monitoring & Evaluation unit in 1999, under the aegis of the Government Māori Language Strategy, to measure the health of the Māori language in a systematic manner.

Several pieces of research were developed and commissioned, including the *Survey of Attitudes towards, and Beliefs and Values about, the Māori language*. This survey provides national level data about the environment for Māori language revitalisation. The results of the survey will be used to:

- Inform policies and programmes aimed at promoting and fostering support for Māori language revitalisation; and
- Identify target areas for initiatives.

THE SURVEY

Following pre-research and a literature review, a pilot survey was undertaken by *BRC Marketing & Social Research*, under contract to Te Puni Kōkiri. This exercise was designed to inform the development of the questionnaire and the methodological approach for the national survey. Subsequently, BRC undertook the national survey between 13 November and 8 December 2000, by telephone, with nationally representative samples of Māori (615) and non-Māori (725). The information from these respondents has been weighted to reflect the Māori and non-Māori populations respectively.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This report presents the most significant findings

from the survey. The analysis in this report is based on twin assumptions that, in the immediate future:

- For Māori people, the objective is to learn and use Māori;
- For non-Māori people, the objective is to create a positive disposition towards Māori people learning and using Māori.

These assumptions are based on theoretical and practical considerations. Māori is the heritage language of the Māori people, and has been recognised by government as a taonga that was guaranteed to Māori. For Māori to survive, Māori must regularly and systematically choose to speak Māori in their everyday interactions and conversations.

For non-Māori, the role is different. It is unlikely, in the immediate future, that non-Māori will contribute greatly to the actual use of Māori. Currently, less than 1% of non-Māori currently speak Māori, and as subsequent results show, some 90% of non-Māori have no desire to learn it. However, the disposition of non-Māori towards te reo does impact on Māori language use by Māori because of its powerful influence on the overall linguistic environment. If the majority of non-Māori have generally positive attitudes towards the Māori language, it is likely that this will reinforce positive attitudes among Māori and encourage greater use of Māori.

ATTITUDES, VALUES AND BELIEFS

For the purposes of this survey, the three phenomena have been defined as follows:

Values: relate to the underlying orientation of an individual towards a language, and ultimately towards the speakers of that language;

Beliefs: relate to knowledge about a language and the people that speak that language. Beliefs can usually be referred to as true or false, or accurate or inaccurate.

Attitudes: relate to opinions towards various aspects of language use in society, e.g. the use of a language in broadcasting, the use of a language in education. They can usually be referred to as positive, negative or neutral.

OVERALL FINDINGS FOR MĀORI

The overall results for Māori represent a positive platform for policy development. It is clear that Māori people value the language as an integral part of Māori society, and that they are committed to the notion of learning and using Māori. Many Māori have some Māori language skills, and are engaged in increasing those skills. Furthermore, Māori are optimistic in their outlook on the language, believing that significant gains have been made over the last five years in the numbers of people learning and using Māori:

- Almost one third of Māori (31%) claimed they could already speak conversational Māori, while another third (34%) claimed they were currently learning.
- Almost two thirds of Māori (63%) agreed that “all Māori should make an effort to learn to speak Māori themselves”, and
- Over half (56%) of all Māori claimed that “learning Māori (was) a very high priority” for them.
- Over two thirds (67%) believed there has been a medium-large increase in the last five years in the number of people learning to speak Māori, and 88% believed more Māori being spoken was a “good thing”.

MĀORI CAN BE SEGMENTED INTO THREE GROUPS

Māori live in ‘diverse realities’; for the purposes of this analysis, the Māori population has been segmented into three groups, based on their values towards the Māori language. The three segments vary in size:

- Cultural Developers (68%);
- Māori only (20%); and
- Disinterested (12%).

CULTURAL DEVELOPERS

These people are, relatively speaking, willing to share and progress their knowledge of Māori language and culture with all ethnic groups.

Typically, they *agree* or *strongly agree* with statements about sharing Māori culture with all New Zealanders (75%), and learning from other cultures (96%). *Cultural Developers* were motivated to learn Māori (58%), and to participate in Māori culture (79%).

MĀORI ONLY

Similarly, the *Māori Only* group were highly motivated to learn Māori (79%), and to participate in Māori culture (86%).

However, they tend to the view that Māori language and culture are the exclusive domains of Māori people. Typically, they *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* that Māori culture was part of the heritage of all New Zealanders (65%). They also believed that “New Zealand would be a better place if there weren’t so many races of people” (72%).

DISINTERESTED

The *Disinterested* group placed very little importance on learning the Māori language (4%), or participating in Māori culture (12%).

MĀORI ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

The different dispositions of the three segments are reflected in their attitudes towards the revitalisation of the Māori language (See Table 1).

The majority of Māori believed that there have been increases in the number of people learning to speak Māori over the last five years (84%), and that formal educational institutions were leading this process (77%).

There was also widespread agreement among all segments of Māori that the government had an important role to play in the revitalisation of the Māori language. In particular, Māori thought that government should support Māori language education (82%) and broadcasting initiatives (76%), and should encourage the use of Māori in various language domains including Māori homes and communities (58%), government departments (74%) and the work place (45%). However, people in the *Disinterested* segment were significantly less likely to agree with these propositions.

People in the three segments ‘engaged’ with Māori language and culture in different ways, in terms of their actual behaviour. People in the *Cultural Developers* and *Māori Only* segments were much more likely to participate in Māori-oriented activities than members of the *Disinterested* segment. For example, some 60% of the *Cultural Developers* segment and 69% of the *Māori Only* segment reported that they regularly ‘go to a marae’, whereas only 33% of the *Disinterested* segment regularly do so. Furthermore, people in the *Cultural Developers* and *Māori Only* segments were also much more likely to tune into iwi radio and Māori news bulletins, read Māori magazines.

OVERALL FINDINGS FOR NON-MĀORI

The overall results for non-Māori suggest that they recognise the value of the Māori language for Māori people. Furthermore, they believe that there

Table 1: Attitudinal Statements about Māori Language, by Segment, for the Māori Population.

% Agree/Strongly agree	All Māori	Cultural developers	Māori Only	Disinterested
	%	%	%	%
Well spoken Māori is a beautiful thing to listen to	97	98	97	87
It is a good thing that Māori people speak Māori on the Marae and at home	94	96	98	77
I have a lot of respect for people who can speak Māori fluently	89	89	91	80
It is a good thing that Māori people speak Māori in public places or at work	68	71	69	45
All Māori should make an effort to learn to speak Māori themselves	63	65	75	40
Learning Māori through casual conversations and at gatherings or at home is better than in a classroom	58	59	55	54
It is okay for Māori to greet others in Māori, but they can take it too far	45	45	41	56
Māori should be a compulsory school subject for Māori children	41	38	58	25
It is not right that Māori speak Māori in front of people who might not understand what they are saying	36	36	28	45

has been positive growth in the numbers of people learning and using Māori over the last five years. However, the results for non-Māori also show that, generally speaking, non-Māori have little knowledge of the Māori language and culture, and that learning Māori is not a priority for them. Furthermore, there are widely divergent views among non-Māori about the use of Māori in public situations:

- 90% of all non-Māori agreed or strongly agreed that “it is a good thing that Māori people speak Māori on the marae and at home”.
- In terms of the revitalisation of the Māori language, just over three quarters (76%) believed there had been an increase in the number of people learning to speak Māori, in the last five years. Just under two thirds (63%) believed that more Māori being spoken was a “good thing”.
- Only 11% of non-Māori indicated that ‘learning Māori is a high priority’ for them;
- One quarter (25%) claimed they “really wanted to be involved in things to do with the Māori culture”;
- However, 59% claimed that “no matter if you are Māori or Pākehā, Māori culture is a part of everyone’s heritage”. Furthermore, 57% claimed that “the more New Zealanders that understand the Māori culture, the less racial tension we would have”.

NON-MĀORI CAN BE SEGMENTED INTO THREE GROUPS

In this analysis, the non-Māori population has been segmented into three discrete groups which reflect the different values they place on Māori

language and culture. In many respects, these three groups mirror the three Māori segments. The three segments vary in size:

- Passive Supporters (49%);
- Disinterested (39%); and
- English Only (12%).

PASSIVE SUPPORTERS

The people in this segment are non-Māori who are receptive to greater use of the Māori language; they see this as a link to their own self-development and greater understanding between different cultures. They typically *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with statements about the value inherent in learning about other cultures (99%), and about the importance of the Māori culture in particular as part of New Zealand’s heritage (89%).

These people are *Passive Supporters* primarily because they are not ‘engaged’ with the Māori language or culture, in terms of their actions and behaviour, despite their claimed positive disposition towards these things.

DISINTERESTED

The non-Māori people in this segment have no real interest in cultures other than their own. In general, they are tolerant of the Māori language and culture, as long as it does not impinge on their lives.

People in this segment were less likely than *Passive Supporters* to *agree* or *strongly agree* with statements about learning about other cultures (85%) and particularly about the importance of the place of Māori language and culture in New Zealand (34%). However, they were not overtly negative in their views with regard to Māori issues.

ENGLISH ONLY

The people in this segment tended to believe that the English language should be the only language used in New Zealand public life. They feared that their own culture will be swamped by Māori language and culture, leading to cultural domination by Māori. Members of the *English Only* segment were the least likely of all non-Māori segments to *agree* or *strongly agree* with statements about learning about other cultures (67%). They were particularly negative in their outlook about Māori culture and people in general. For example, they associated little importance with the Māori culture and people for the future good of New Zealand and New Zealanders (3%).

NON-MĀORI ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

The values of the different segments towards the Māori language are reflected in their attitudes towards Māori, in particular the notion that non-Māori will tolerate the use of Māori by Māori people in Māori domains, but not in other situations (See Table 2).

Despite these differences in attitudes, non-Māori in all three segments shared common beliefs about the current status of the Māori language. There was general agreement that about 10% of all New Zealanders can speak conversational Māori (75%), and that there has been an increase in this figure over the last five years (77%). Non-Māori also believed that formal educational institutions were leading this process (84%).

Among the non-Māori population, the *Passive Supporters* segment typically agreed that government has a role to play in supporting the

learning and use of the Māori language, through education, broadcasting and the use of Māori on public occasions. However, this support declined significantly in the *Disinterested* and *English Only* segments.

In general, non-Māori did not 'engage' with Māori language and culture at all. *Passive Supporters* indicated that they sometimes tuned into Māori news (17%) and visited Māori oriented exhibitions (16%). Otherwise, less than 5% of people in the *Disinterested* and *English Only* segments indicated that they participated in activities involving Māori language and culture.

NEXT STEPS

A large data set was collected in the Survey of Attitudes towards, and Beliefs and Values about, the Māori language. This data has been tabulated and analysed, and a detailed descriptive report on the findings is currently being prepared for press. In the interim, the data tables are available for viewing at www.tpk.govt.nz.

This descriptive report will be accompanied by an analytical volume. This will include contributions by government agencies, sociolinguists, Māori language advocates and other commentators. Their analyses will translate the data into information to develop and enhance policies and programmes to foster support for Māori language revitalisation.

For further information about this report, or the planned publications, please contact:

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Table 2: Attitudinal Statements about Māori Language, by Segment, for the Non-Māori Population.

% Agree/Strongly agree	All non-Māori	Passive supporters	Disinterested	English Only
	%	%	%	%
It is a good thing that Māori people speak Māori on the Marae and at home	90	92	88	82
Well spoken Māori is a beautiful thing to listen to	78	85	71	66
I have a lot of respect for people who can speak Māori fluently	74	83	68	55
It is not right that Māori speak Māori in front of people who might not understand what they are saying	54	43	61	73
All Māori should make an effort to learn to speak Māori themselves	51	55	49	45
Learning Māori through casual conversations and at gatherings or at home is better than in a classroom	51	50	49	60
It is okay for Māori to greet others in Māori, but they can take it too far	51	51	68	83
It is a good thing that Māori people speak Māori in public places or at work	40	54	30	21
Māori should be a compulsory school subject for Māori children	21	25	19	15

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