

# TE TIROHANGA I TE KÖREROTANGA O TE REO RANGATIRA I ROTO I NGĀ KĀINGA MĀORI ME NGĀ ROHE

Survey of Language Use in Maori Households  
and Communities

PĀNUI WHAKAMŌHIO  
INFORMATION BULLETIN

73

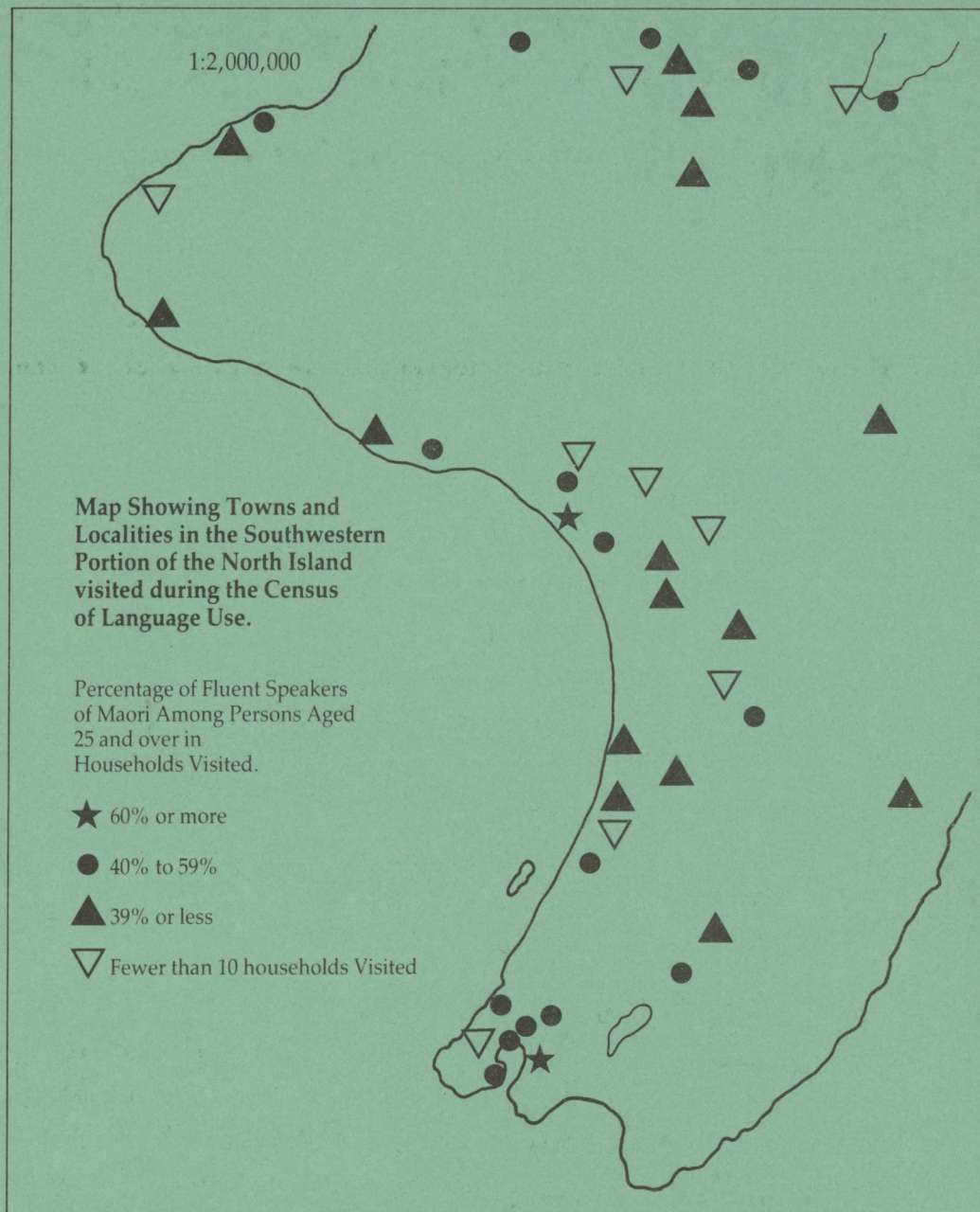
Localities in which  
ten or more households  
were visited

● Two thirds or  
more of adults were  
fluent speakers of  
Maori

◆ Less than two  
thirds of adults were  
fluent speakers of  
Maori

HE PŪRONGORONGO  
WHAKAMŌHIO  
MĀ NGĀ KAIURU KI TE  
TORONGA TUATAHI,  
1973-1978

A report to Participants in the  
Initial Investigation, 1973-1978



## THE MAORI LANGUAGE IN PONGAROA

Fieldwork for the census of language use in Maori communities took place in 15 households in Pongaroa in December 1975. The interviewers were Iriaka and Peter Wensor (Ngapuhi). Twelve interviews were carried out in English; the rest were partly or entirely in Maori.

The households surveyed had a total population of 72, and 62 of these people were of Maori descent. This was most of the Maori population of Pongaroa at the time.

### RESULTS OF THE LINGUISTIC SURVEY

#### *Iwi Affiliation*

The people interviewed mentioned seven major iwi to which they or members of their households belonged. Ngati Kahungunu with 22 people or nearly a third of the total was the largest iwi in the survey. Waikato and Ngapuhi were the next largest tribal groups.

#### *Ability To Speak And Understand Maori*

The table on the next page shows that about one-tenth of the people surveyed spoke Maori well while a little more understood the language well. All the fluent speakers were adults over 24, and few people under this age could understand people talking in Maori. Two-thirds of the people knew hardly any Maori at the time. They included nearly all those under 25 as well as a quarter of the adults between the ages of 25 and 44.

KNOWLEDGE OF SPOKEN MAORI IN PONGAROA (1975)

Age Group	Fluent Speakers		Understand Easily		Limited Understanding		No Knowledge	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
45 & over	3	50	4	67	1	17	1	17
25-44	4	27	5	33	6	40	4	27
15-24	0		1	8	4	33	7	58
2-14	0		0		1	3	33	97
Overall	7	11	10	14	12	17	50	69

(Numbers and percentages refer to members of households visited; percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number).

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*The Use Of Maori Language In The Household*

English was the main language for everyday use in most households visited. There were 14 homes with dependent children and in 13 of them people spoke mostly or only in English. In the other home, the parents often spoke Maori together, but English was still the main language spoken. The person living in the only childless household visited always spoke English to friends and visitors to the home.

*The Maori Language In The Community*

English was also the main language spoken between neighbours, friends and workmates in the community. The people most likely

to use Maori often in Pongaroa were kaumatua over the age of 45, and they spoke it usually with other older people. But if they wanted to talk with people under 25 they had to use English, as very few of this age group understood any Maori, apart from the usual greetings and some other words.

The Maori language was still important in ceremonies on the marae, and in certain religious services in the area. Many people were worried that there were few people under 30 who could speak Maori well enough to take over from their local kaumatua when they passed on.

If any two members of the Maori community in Pongaroa were to meet unexpectedly, the chances were about 1 in 60 that they would be able to understand each other in Maori. If both were adults the chances were much greater, about 1 in 4, but if they were under 25 it would be very unlikely that they could speak in Maori with each other.

*Attitudes Towards The Language*

Many of the people we interviewed were worried that fewer and fewer people knew or used Maori in Pongaroa. It could die out altogether. People felt that Maori had hardly any chance of surviving as a language for everyday purposes in the home and community. This was because active speakers of Maori were over the age of 45, and Maori was used mainly on the marae and in other important meetings. Some people felt whakama about trying to speak Maori among themselves in case they made errors through not using it often enough. Besides, they could express their ideas quicker in English. Most adults in the survey couldn't speak the language well, and therefore couldn't teach it to their children, but they wanted it taught in schools, especially at the primary level. Many people thought this was the only way that the community could keep some small hold on the language of their ancestors, which was rapidly being lost.

The three sets of graphs for each locality on the page opposite represent the under 25, 25 to 44, and over 45-years-old age groups, respectively. →

### CONCLUSION

At the time of the survey, the Maori language in Pongarua was used mainly in ceremonies on the marae and in certain religious services in the home and in the community. The people most likely to speak Maori were kaumatua over the age of 45. Away from the marae, few people had the chance to use the language in ordinary chat, as two-thirds of the people in the area understood hardly any Maori.

Many people felt that only a really great effort to bring Maori back, especially in the homes, could save it from dying out altogether. Most people thought that this couldn't happen. English was so widely used in TV, radio programmes, newspapers and books that it was almost impossible to keep children's minds on learning and speaking Maori in the home. Nearly all the school-age children knew no Maori at the time. Parents wanted the language taught in schools, but many felt that their children did not hear enough spoken Maori in the community for these courses to be of any use. Some felt that most New Zealanders cared little about the language, as if they thought the place for Maori was on the marae only. In other areas surveyed, some people have also given Maori hardly any chance of staying alive. Parents and elders have been so concerned that they have begun Maori language and culture classes on local marae, in schools and in private homes. Local offices of the Department of Maori Affairs have also played their part by starting up schemes they hope will help to keep the Maori language alive. People who want to find out about them should get in touch with the local Maori Affairs office.

This report was prepared by Lee Smith (Ngati Kahungunu).

Knowledge of Maori Language by Age Groups on Selected Areas at the time of the Linguistic Census



## The Survey of Language Use in Maori Households and Communities

The census of language use on which this report is based is the first part of a general study of the place of the Maori language in Maori communities, its structure, how it is spoken and written under modern conditions, and its relevance to New Zealand as a nation. This study is being conducted by the Maori Unit of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Fieldwork for the census phase began in Whangaroa County and Te Tii in August 1973, and ended in August 1978. Follow-up studies and studies in additional communities will be undertaken from time to time (the first of these was conducted in Waverley in August 1979).

The map on the front cover shows the approximate localities in which ten or more households were visited between 1973 and 1979. Since the linguistic census was completed, the major task of the Unit has been the analysing and reporting of the information collected. At the same time, however, studies of the structure and usage of the Maori language have commenced; these will result in a series of handbooks and other materials for teachers of Maori (including parents), and for people wishing to learn the language. An example of this is *The First Basic Maori Word List*, published in 1982. Other publications have included background studies for bilingual education projects, and reports on policy issues affecting the Maori language and Maori speakers – for example, the legal status of Maori in New Zealand.

### The Purpose of This Report

This report has been prepared for the people who participated in the original survey and who provided the information on which it is based. It is hoped that it will encourage people to compare the situation now with that at the time covered by the report, and that this information will provide a basis for discussion and debate about what action, if any, each community might take to ensure that the Maori language is at least as important in the twenty-first century as it was in the 1970s.

### Further Information

One copy of this report is provided free to each person interviewed during the linguistic census in the area concerned, and to local schools, Maori Language Boards, and Maori Committees. Further information about the linguistic survey, and lists of publications, may be obtained from the Maori Unit, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, P.O. Box 3237, Wellington.



### Ngā Mihi/Special Thanks

Our first thanks must go to the 6,500 Maori families who entrusted us with the information presented in this series of reports. Fieldwork for the survey was funded substantially by contributions from the Lottery Board of Control, Fletcher Holdings Limited, the Maori Purposes Fund, and the Maori Education Foundation. The coding and analysis of the data was supported initially by a grant from Fletcher Holdings Limited, and further financial assistance for these purposes has been provided by Mobil Oil N.Z. Limited, the Post Primary Teachers Association, the New Zealand Educational Institute and the Raukawa Trustees. The writing of these reports was made possible by the generosity of the J.R. McKenzie Trust.