

## **The role of indigenous women in sound change: the Maori language in New Zealand**

Maori, a Polynesian language, is the indigenous language of New Zealand. The arrival of large numbers of British settlers from the mid-1850s led to a decline in use of the Maori language, particularly after the 1940s when the Maori population became increasingly urbanised [1]. Since the 1970s the Maori language has been the subject of extensive revitalisation efforts. At present, it is claimed that approximately 130,000 Maori people (23 percent of the Maori population) can speak Maori to at least a basic extent [2]. All of these speakers are also fluent speakers of New Zealand English. The MAONZE (Maori and New Zealand English) project has charted the considerable change in the way Maori men pronounce Maori over the last 100 years as English has become increasingly important in Maori life [3]. International sociolinguistic studies usually show that women lead when the sounds of a language are changing [4]. Analyses of the speech of Maori women born as early as 1881 confirm that the speech of these women has changed in similar ways to that of the men. This paper will present the results of analyses of the quality and duration of Maori monophthongs and discuss how the observed sound changes highlight the role of Maori women in sound change over the last 100 years. The results have implications for other indigenous languages undergoing revitalisation.

**Keywords:** Maori, New Zealand English, language change, language contact, women, language revitalisation, acoustic analysis, vowel shift

[1] Richard Benton (1991). *The Maori language: dying or reviving?* Hawaii: East-West Center.

[2] Te Puni Kokiri (2008). *The Health of the Maori language in 2006*. Wellington: Author.

[3] Ray Harlow, Peter Keegan, Jeanette King, Margaret Maclagan & Catherine Watson (2008). The changing sound of the Maori language. James N. Stanford & Dennis R. Preston (eds). *Variation in Indigenous Minority Languages*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins. p.129-152.

[4] Jenny Cheshire (2002). Sex and Gender in Variationist Research. J. K. Chambers, Peter Trudgill & Natalie Schilling-Estes (eds). *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*. Malden, Massachusetts, USA and Oxford: Blackwell. pp.422-43, especially p.429

## The Maori language of New Zealand

Maori is an Austronesian language currently spoken in the central, eastern and northern regions of the North Island in New Zealand (NZ), and in most NZ urban centres as a result of Maori urbanisation. Maori was isolated for up to 500 years from the East Polynesian languages in the Pacific from which it derived. European colonization (in the 1800s) led to a rapid decline in the Maori population, assimilation, and a shift towards English. Maori Language revitalization efforts increased in the 1970s. Current estimates for the number of fluent speakers range from 30,000 to 150,000, some 10 to 20 % of the total Maori population. All Maori now speak English. Almost all Maori today have European ancestry. The Maori population has increased since the early 1900s.

