Hawai'ian and Te Reo Māori: School as Hearth in Language Restoration

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LING 320: Sociolinguistics 1

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Abstract

In the broader global moment of Indigenous political and cultural resurgence, the revitalization and reclamation of traditional languages has emerged as an important facet of these decolonial efforts. While there are many ongoing language restoration projects around the world, Māori and Hawai'ian feature prominently in this field as two success stories of seemingly commensurate standing. However, closer scrutiny reveals not only nuances in the language restoration targets of each, but differing success rates for those respective goals. Despite developing parallel to each other, the Hawai'ian language movement has had greater success in its language revival efforts due to its prioritization of schools as centers for strong culturally diffused language networks, while the competing biculturalist and neotraditionalist ideological frameworks of the Māori language movement are paired in such a way that undermines the effectiveness of its linguistic revitalization efforts.

1 Introduction

The restoration of Indigenous languages has been a topic of significant international interest in the last half century as advocates push to decolonize the social and political landscapes in which they reside. It often follows a broader renaissance movement to reclaim Indigenous political rights and cultural heritage. Māori and Hawaiian- often cited in the same breath- are widely regarded as success stories in Indigenous language restoration, though for slightly different motives (Pine and Turin 2017, 7). Māori, the Indigenous language of Aotearoa/New Zealand, is seen as a successful case of language revitalization, the robust expansion in the domains and the number of speakers of a language in decline. Meanwhile, Hawai'ian, the Indigenous language of Hawai'i, is viewed as an almost miraculous example of language revival, the regaining of native speakers after all domains of use were lost and intergenerational transmission of language was disrupted.

2 Discussion

Situated in similar contexts, located in Polynesian island nations dominated by an English-speaking majority, Hawai'ian and Māori are fitting cases to contrast. Fittingly, the Hawai'ian language movement based their language planning on a model for preschool "language nests" first conceptualized and realized in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The movements, both initiated in the early 1980s, essentially developed in parallel to each other (Kawai'ae'a, Houseman, and Alencastre 2007). Despite these shared features and widespread acclamations of success, the instances of language planning have produced drastically different outcomes and varying levels of effectiveness in their respective goals. Due to differing prioritizations in school-centered language planning strategies, Hawai'ian has been more overtly successful in its effort of language revival, whereas Māori's vision of language revitalization, while not an explicit failure, has fallen short of expectations.

Language shift is a phenomenon that occurs when the domains in which a certain language is utilized start to change or are eliminated in favor of another, as a result of contact with that external language. It can occur due to a wide variety of factors, yet it is an all-too-prevalent phenomenon, particularly in colonial contexts in which the traditional language of a community is systematically marginalized by government policies of language assimilation. Māori and Hawai'ian are only two of the thousands of languages whose vitality has been harmed by these policies (Horowitz 2021). Fishman, deemed the preeminent authority in the field of language shift reversal, offers a basic framework for addressing this issue in his 1990 piece, "What is Reversing Language Shift (RLS) and how can it succeed?" The article delineates an 8-point Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) for identifying the extent of language shift and thus stages for its reversal. He stresses the importance of stage 6, family-, neighborhood-, and community reinforcement, as foundational for the success of the entire enterprise and argues: "If this stage is not satisfied, all else can amount to little more than biding time" (Fishman 1990, 21). He warns against the temptation to rely too heavily on the educational system for reversing language shift, which he considers a policy often over-indulged. If this education does not meaningfully strengthen stage 6 language bonds, which he believes can only occur if the education is accompanied by higher government-administered cultural autonomy, then, he asserts, "there is absolutely no reason to assume that schooling...is either a guarantee of or even a prop for successful RLS" (Fishman 1990, 23).

Fishman's RLS theory is revisited in his 2001 book *Can Threatened Languages be Saved?,* a follow-up to his seminal 1991 compilation of work on reversing language shift. The former revisits case studies around the globe in detail—Māori included—to see where they fall on his GIDS in comparison to

a decade earlier. The chapter on Māori, by Nena Benton and Richard Benton, analyzes the discrepancy between the superficial success of Māori revitalization expressed in the sudden increase in Māori competency on state-wide census data, and the on-the-ground reality. The 8% jump in conversational ability in Māori from 1995 to 1996, most notably in younger speakers, owes credit to the educational institutions that, for many children were "the only places they ever hear[d] or sp[oke] Māori" (Fishman 2001, 423). However, the authors go on to state that due primarily to thinly spread resources, these institutions, particularly Māori-immersion schools, often lack "teachers who have sufficient knowledge of Māori to teach effectively through the language" (Fishman 2001, 436). If these centers act as the sole language input for children, then the quality of that input will either make or break children's competence in the language. The census data, in its phrasing of conversational ability rather than fluency, masks the true figure of speakers proficient enough to incorporate the language into their home lives. The staffing issue in immersion schools hinders children's ability to adequately acquire the language and decreases the likelihood that they will pass the language on to their own children.

"Pu'a I ka'Olelo, Ola ka'Ohana: Three Generations of Hawaiian Language Revitalization," co-authored by Kawai'ae'a, Houseman, and Alencastre, contains testimony from the pioneers of the Hawai'ian language revival campaign, including the first new generation of L1 speakers. It offers an intimate perspective on the development of this movement, the status of the language prior to this, and the factors needed to ensure its success. The article makes clear that by the time of its revival, Hawai'ian was experiencing the most advanced stages of language shift. By the time Aha Punana Leo, a non-profit dedicated to language revival, was established in 1983, knowledge of the language was no longer within living memory for any generation of Hawai'ians, apart from the isolated speakers of Ni'ihau island (Kawai'ae'a, Houseman, and Alencastre 2007). With no fluent parents, or even grandparents, to aid in the transmission of the language, these determined families relied entirely on the learning environment provided by their children's Hawai'ian-immersion schools for language acquisition. The core tenets of this program involved an emphasis on parent engagement, providing high-quality culturally based education, and a commitment to "speak Hawaiian everywhere and at all times" (214). As preparation for this ambitious project, native speakers and teachers lived together at a site for 2-3 weeks during the summer, functioning to strengthen social networks, develop curriculum, engage in cultural activities, and converse with native speakers.

The result of such steadfast dedication to language revival is explored in Brenzinger and Heinrich's (2013) "The return of Hawaiian: Language networks of the revival movement," in which they discuss how the creation of strong dense Hawai'ian language networks built around the educational system were the key to the revival and maintenance of the language. The greatest challenge for Hawai'ian

language revival was two-fold: it had to establish a way to achieve native fluency in children without the family-, neighborhood-, community nexus, since this process of intergenerational transmission was unavailable for use, as well as regain domains for the language that had been lost completely. The authors demonstrate how close-knit language networks act as a solution to both issues by inculcating its members in an all-encompassing environment. Hawai'ian serves as the primary language for all domains, rather than pursuing an attempt to sequentially recuperate one domain after another. The bonds developed in this community of practice help fill the language transmission role normally carried out by the home and family and, by putting children in close contact with the language in more than one domain, the language is further reinforced. The article further discusses that these language networks are effective precisely because they do not confine themselves to a particular ethnicity or nationality. Rather, membership is extended based on language attitude and competence.

Cowell (2012) delves deeper into how these issues of identity play into the success of language revitalization movements in his paper, "The Hawaiian model of language revitalization: problems of extension to mainland native America," in which he argues that the "dispersed cultural" nature of Hawai'ian identity, rather than a strictly ethnic one, is what has allowed the language revival movement to gain such public support and, especially, attracted so many young participants. He references the collective memory, still shared by Hawai'ians today, of "a literate, self-governing" nation which carried out its functions almost entirely through the Hawai'ian language up until the end of the 19th century, when the monarchy was overthrown, and a subsequent policy of English-only education was implemented (178). This is a shared past that crosses ethnic lines and invests the entire population of the state in the recuperation of such a rich history, allowing a "local" Hawai'ian identity and its associated cultural and linguistic qualities to become salient and take on prestige over external identifiers. Cowell contrasts this notably with the recent trend towards linking language and ethnicity occurring in the Māori context—in essence racializing such language learning— as a possible explanation for the latter's underperformance regarding language revitalization.

Tracing the trajectory of Māori language planning grants crucial insights into how its development from one ideological policy framework to another has influenced the efforts of language revitalization. Albury (2015) analyzes Aotearoa/New Zealand's shift from a biculturalist policy to a more neotraditionalist approach in his paper, "Your language or ours? Inclusion and exclusion of non-indigenous majorities in Māori and Sámi language revitalization policy." When language revitalization efforts began in earnest in the 1980s, the government adopted a biculturalist policy agenda that saw the Māori language as part of a shared cultural heritage for all citizens, Indigenous and nonindigenous alike. Lately, however, there's been a shift towards viewing Indigenous language, and thus language

revitalization efforts, as reserved for Indigenous peoples, a neotraditionalist approach that aims to return the language to its people "as a matter of post-colonial healing" (Albury, 2015). The biculturalist agenda has rendered the Māori language incredibly salient in the broader social landscape, and elevated its status on a structural level, fostering the conception that the language is thriving. This has generated a sense of complacency about the language among the public whereby "Māori and non-Māori appear generally positive about language revitalization but do not act on this through language acquisition" (Albury 2015). This complacency is reinforced, particularly for non-Māori, by a neotraditionalist attitude that has shifted the responsibility for actually acquiring the language onto ethnic Māori, further reducing the demographic for which it can become a language for everyday use.

The language revitalization and language revival efforts for Māori and Hawai'ian, respectively, must be situated in their proper contexts if their impact is to be adequately understood. By the time genuine attempts at reversing language shift were made in both Aotearoa/New Zealand and Hawai'i, intergenerational transmission was on its last legs: fewer than 100 children were fluent Māori speakers, whereas for Hawai'ian, this figure had dropped to less than 50 (Fishman 2001, 425; Kawai'ae'a, Houseman, and Alencastre 2007, 183). However, Māori was still very much a living language for the older demographic, with 18% of the geographically dispersed Māori population—mostly 55 and older—fluent in the language (Hardman 2018, 17). Thus, the Māori language of the early 1980s, with an active and extended elderly population, can be associated with stage 7 of Fishman's language shift GIDS. This was not the case for Hawai'ian, whose native speakers were restricted to the older segment of the roughly 200 inhabitants of the privately-owned Ni'ihau island (State of Hawaii 2011, 5). This geographic isolation meant that fluent speakers weren't widely available, so that Hawai'ian in the 1980s appeared to correspond more to the 8th and final stage of language shift. Yet Hawai'ian has now resurged to become the 5th most spoken language in the home—besides English—comprising 5.7% of the population of Hawai'i (Detailed Languages Spoken at Home in the State of Hawaii 2016). This ranking is higher among youth, for which Hawai'ian, along with Japanese, "is the non-English language most commonly spoken" (The Surprising Revival of the Hawai'ian Language 2019). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Māori is the most spoken language besides English, though its speakers make up a smaller percentage overall, with just 3.2% of the country's entire population (Top 25 Languages in New Zealand 2022).

In an identical stretch of time, Hawai'ian has seemingly made greater strides than Māori, though it started at a sharper disadvantage. The root of this success can be found in the Hawai'ian education program, whose popularity and reach has only continued to grow in recent years. Children can now start their language immersion path from as young as six weeks up until they graduate their doctorate program. Rather than hindering potential success later in life, as many parents feared would occur if they veered

from mainstream English schooling, Hawai'ian immersion education has enhanced academic performance in its students. Graduation and college attendance rates are significantly above the state average, and at the Nāwahī immersion school, students who make up "less than 2% of the Hilo High School Senior class [account] for 16% of its summa cum laude graduates" (Benzinger and Heinrich 2013). As Cowell (2012) mentions, the success of this model could be informed partly by the precedence set by the highly literate Hawai'ian language education during the monarchy still embedded in the cultural memory of Hawai'ians. The Māori people of Aotearoa/New Zealand, though highly literate in the 19th century as well, have never had this history of self-government or robust literary work associated with their language, leaving people with less faith in the potential of the Māori language as a medium for education (Hardman 2018). This lack of faith is evident in the declining role of Māori immersion programs in children's education. After a peak in 1993, enrollment rates in the very preschool immersion models that inspired the Hawai'ian movement fell from almost 50% of Māori children to less than a quarter, and this was coupled by a drop in the number of centers, from over 800 "language nests" at their peak to less than 300 in 2015 (Albury 2015; Hardman 2018, 23).

As Indigenous languages in island states with low linguistic diversity, Māori and Hawai'ian are particularly primed for efforts at language restoration since funding and resources can be directed at one language revitalization effort. This is in opposition to other Indigenous contexts where many threatened languages are frequently vying for resource allocation. Despite this, Māori-language educational efforts have been continuously plagued by scarce resources at a far greater level than their Hawai'ian counterpart. As Nena and Richard Benton note, Māori immersion primary schools are often "ill-equipped, lacking stable staffing," and "unable to recruit trained teachers" (Fishman 2001, 436). This ensures that Māori immersion schools lag behind English-medium schools in terms of quality of education, disincentivizing enrollment. Though immersion schools are better able to impart language competency over bilingual or Māori-as-a foreign-language models, when that is the only other option, many Māori families will instead enroll their children in English-medium schools. For the children who do attend these immersion schools, early language acquisition does seem to occur successfully, however, "many first language speakers have not been able to maintain proficiency in Māori into adulthood" (Lane 2020, 351). This drop-off in proficiency cuts off the chance to reestablish a self-sustaining cycle of intergenerational transmission, making language revitalization efforts entirely reliant on an already pressured educational system.

The biculturalist policy strategy adopted by the government may also be to blame for the strain on human resources in schools. The push to create a bilingual nation and increase all citizens' exposure to Māori has led the government to explicitly voice plans for "more than 20 percent of the country's

population to speak basic Māori by 2040," by pledging to "provide Māori lessons in all New Zealand schools by 2025" (Graham McLay 2018). In a country already experiencing a shortage of Māori speaking educators, expanding the scope of the language revitalization project prematurely will only undermine the effectiveness of existing efforts. The government is essentially advancing a "quantity over quality" approach, expressed in its vision of "basic" Māori proficiency as opposed to a smaller proportion of truly fluent speakers. This is an issue as it doesn't create a core speaker base for which the language can be comfortably used in daily life, and more importantly, it prioritizes outsiders who don't have a stake in the language. Fishman (1990) affirms that outside support through language learning is often "situational, temporary, idiosyncratic and even reversible," and not conducive to intergenerational transmission as the threatened language is not normally adopted as the language of the home (465).

The core motive of the biculturalist approach in Aotearoa/New Zealand, in its attempt to widen the Māori-speaking demographic, however effective this has been, seeks to address the very real concern of bringing the language back into the public domain. Several sources have pointed to the importance of generating a critical mass of speakers for the language to hold its own in a social fabric dominated by English. Bauer (2008) speaks of a "dilution" effect in which, if Māori speakers are not in enough concentration in a community, their odds of being able to use the language in daily conversation, regardless of their knowledge of it, are greatly diminished. She argues that "for a language to survive, what matters is not who *can* speak it, but who *does* speak it" (63). This tipping point, to avoid code-switching to the dominant language, is 80%, Hardman (2018) finds. That is: for the status of the language to be considered stable, 80% of the community must be able to speak Māori. It is here that the geographical diffusion of the ethnic Māori population throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand, especially in urban centers filled with non-Māori, presents a challenge for creating a cohesive community of Māori speakers. The neotraditionalist attitudes in the country prevent a serious uptake in non-Māori language learners, making this figure of 80% difficult to achieve for interethnic communities.

The Hawai'ian language revival, in contrast, has been able to overcome this issue by deemphasizing an ethnic association with language. Rather than centering communities on ethnic kinship bonds as the Māori do in Aotearoa/New Zealand, communities are established around the Hawai'ian language itself. Hawai'ian speakers don't have to worry about geographical distribution because community can be created anywhere there is interest in the language, indiscriminate of ethnic boundaries. These small but dense language networks identified by Brenzinger and Heinrich evade the effects of diglossia or code-switching by maintaining a Hawai'ian-only environment in which Hawai'ian is the socially acceptable language and members don't feel pressure to default to English. In this social space, non-speakers of Hawai'ian are "not linguistically accommodated," and in fact the language network is

quite exceptional in its implementation of "strict language behavioral norms" (Brenzinger and Heinrich 2013). These norms are enforced through Hawai'ian educational institutions, which require parents to take Hawai'ian language courses along with their children—to promote the language at home—in order to participate in the program. This is one strategy that uses the educational system to directly target language acquisition in the family sphere, with quite effective results. Idiomatic expressions and speech styles, which deviate from the standard Hawai'ian they have been taught, demonstrate that the new native speakers of Hawai'ian have taken command of the language and are already leading it forward towards change, the unequivocal sign of a living language (Brenzinger and Heinrich 2013). This contradicts Fishman's (1990) assertion that educational institutions are incapable of replacing the role of the family and community in reversing language shift. When done right, educational programs can be vital strongholds of language revitalization.

3 Conclusion

Language policies that target the family and community, the cornerstone of language survival, are difficult to implement, which is why most strategies attempt to indirectly influence this sphere by beginning at the level of the school. Hawai'ian immersion schools avoid the pitfalls of other revitalization efforts centered around schooling by transcending their role as educational institutions to become pillars of community. They achieve this by building strong social networks around the language that impel parent engagement and incentivize membership though high quality educational standards. Māori language revitalization strategies, however, due to the waning influence of their language immersion programs, have likely only slowed down the decline of the language. Emphasis on a bicultural language strategy has depleted educational resources and imbued the movement with a sense of complacency while neotraditionalist attitudes have prioritized passive comprehension over fluency among the majority population which is insufficient for intergenerational transmission. This is not to say that the Māori language revitalization cannot be successful through these policies, but rather, a better balance between the two ideological approaches must be achieved if the movement wishes to maintain viable Māori language communities long-term.

The entire field dedicated to the study of reversing language shift is relatively new, leaving many potential avenues for future research. None of the sources I referenced addressed the presence of Hawai'ian pidgin in relation to language revival efforts in Hawai'i. Future research could analyze the existence of the pidgin-Standard English continuum in Hawai'i compared to its absence in Aotearoa/New Zealand to see if and how this affects language restoration efforts. Whether the Hawai'ian language

revival effort carries its momentum forward remains to be seen, and follow-up research on the families that first started this process a generation or two from now and whether they have maintained intergenerational language transmission would be of significant interest. In the absence of strong ethnic ties to the language, it would be intriguing to investigate factors in the Hawai'ian revival movement that influence who decides to pass on the language to their children. Undoubtedly, language restoration is an ongoing process, so it would be disingenuous to call either movement a success or a failure, but rather, the Hawai'ian language revival is succeeding whereas the Māori language revitalization has yet to succeed.

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