

# entreviSta

## HINUREWA POUTU

*por Marcus Maia (UFRJ)<sup>1</sup> e Arianna Berardi-Wiltshire (Massey University/NZ)*



As a fluent speaker, a teacher, a researcher of Te Reo Māori and the youngest member of the New Zealand Māori Language Commission, Hinurewa Poutu is passionate about preserving the indigenous language of New Zealand and believes the future of Te Reo Māori rests with the younger generation. Hinurewa, who works as a teacher in the same Māori-medium school where she received her education, has also worked as a television presenter, a Māori language consultant and an associate producer for Māori media. She was a member of the New Zealand Constitutional Advisory Panel, and as a Massey University Studies Graduate, she recently defended her doctoral thesis — written entirely in Māori — on Māori language use among teenagers and young adults who have attended Māori-medium schools. Speaking in support for the introduction of Māori as a compulsory subject in New Zealand mainstream education, Hinurewa believes Māori language belongs to all New Zealanders, Māori and non-Māori alike and that in order for Te Reo Māori to flourish, it needs to break out of its ceremonial

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mold and to be made “cool” enough for everyday use by the younger generation of speakers.

**Revista Linguística:** To begin our interview, we would love it if you could tell us a little about yourself and your background. What has been the role of Te Reo Māori in your upbringing and education?

*Ko Ngāti Rangī, ko Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangī, ko Ngāti Maniapoto ōku iwi. I tupu ake ahau i Papaioea, ā, i poipoia ahau i te kōhanga reo, i te kura kaupapa Māori, i te wharekura. Tēnā koutou katoa.*

**Hinurewa Poutu:** I am of Māori descent and my tribal affiliations include Ngāti Rangī, Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangī and Ngāti Maniapoto. I was born and raised in Palmerston North, in the Manawatu area of New Zealand. My parents are of the generation who did not grow up speaking Māori, however they learnt it as adults and chose to speak Māori to me. I was educated through kōhanga reo, kura kaupapa Māori and wharekura which are Māori language schools.

**Revista Linguística:** We have several endangered languages in Brazil. Unfortunately there have been very few programs of preservation and revitalization that can be reported as having achieved any success. On the other hand, Te Kōhanga Reo is considered one of the most successful language revitalization tools in the world. Could you tell us how it works and why it has been so successful?

**Hinurewa Poutu:** Kōhanga Reo, or ‘language nests’, are Māori early-childhood centers that focus on infants and preschoolers. The first Kōhanga Reo were places where babies and young children could be put together with elders and fluent speakers of Te Reo Māori so that they could grow up from a young age in a Māori-speaking environment. Then, in the mid-eighties, once the first Kōhanga Reo children reached the age to attend school and joined mainstream New Zealand schools, families found that their children were losing the language within a short period of time, by going into an English speaking environment where no Māori was spoken. That led to the development of Māori-medium language schools, which are known as Kura Kaupapa Māori. As for their success... It really depends on your definition of success (laughs). The Kōhanga Reo movement has certainly done a lot for the revitalization of Te Reo Māori, although in recent years there has been a decline in the number of Kōhanga Reo centers around New Zealand. Also the Kōhanga Reo Trust has recently lodged a claim before the Waitangi Tribunal. The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 as an agreement between the British Crown and a number of Māori leaders at the time, and Te Kōhanga Reo Trust has argued in recent years that Crown policy and government policy in New Zealand has restricted the growth and development of Kōhanga. But in saying that it has certainly made a significant contribution to the revival of Te Reo Māori, and people like myself have benefitted from it in that we have been raised through Kōhanga as fluent speakers of Māori. Earlier today you joined a Māori immersion teacher-training course, and actually a number of the students in that program are graduates of Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori, Māori-medium schools.

**Revista Linguística:** You are currently working as a high-school teacher at Mana Tamariki,

**the same Māori-medium school where you were educated. Can you tell us about the teaching philosophy and practices of Māori-medium schools?**

**Hinurewa Poutu:** There are different types of Kura Kaupapa Māori or Māori-medium schools. Mana Tamariki, where I work, follows the principles of Te Aho Matua, a guiding philosophy for Kura Kaupapa Māori which is based on a holistic approach to pedagogy designed to integrate the physical, emotional, spiritual and environmental aspects of education with a strong Māori world view. That's the main principle that guides how we function as Kura Kaupapa Māori. Earlier this year the national curriculum document aligning with Te Aho Matua was published by Te Rūnanga Nui o ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori o Aotearoa, the National Organization for Māori-medium schools that follow Te Aho Matua. At primary level there are many teaching resources available in Te Reo Māori, including books and teaching materials in Te Reo. But in these particular schools, learning is driven by a Māori worldview integrated within a contemporary and modern education system.



Mana Tamariki – Language Nest and Maori Medium School

**Revista Linguística: What is your experience of the use of technology to support the education of children in Māori medium schools?**

**Hinurewa Poutu:** When I was in high school I studied New Zealand Social History through video conferencing. There were only two of us studying in this particular class in our school in Palmerston North and we connected with teachers and students who were based in Rotorua and Auckland. We'd dial up and meet and that's how we were able to have classes in that subject in our senior year at high school.

Currently at our school we have students who are learning senior math and their teacher is based somewhere else and through video-conferencing tools they are able to access math lessons taught in Māori. The technology allows students the freedom to pursue the subjects they choose even without the availability of locally-based teachers of that subject who can deliver lessons in Te Reo. As part of my work at Mana Tamariki I have taught Media Studies to students from across the country. That's

one useful method that we have employed to overcome the low numbers of teachers that are fluent in Te Reo Māori and also qualified in the specific subjects they need to teach to senior-level students. That kind of technology wasn't always available in schools so that's certainly a recent advantage for students in Māori-medium schools today. At Mana Tamariki we have one student doing math through video-conferencing, and four students studying practical art, so they all get together in front of the Video Conference screen with their boards and their paintings.

**Revista Linguística: Is English language taught as a subject in Māori-medium schools?**

**Hinurewa Poutu:** In our school English is introduced in year 8 as a formal subject. Māori is the only medium of instruction until students are twelve-years old. Only then they start formal English classes with an English language teacher, but all other subjects are taught in Māori, so math, science and social studies... all of those subjects are taught in Māori. However, all our students are bilingual and speak English fluently by the time it's introduced as a school subject. When it gets to senior-level high school, the teaching of some subjects can include bilingual elements, depending on the subject and the study resources that are available. That's because overall there are fewer Māori teaching and learning resources for senior-level high school classes than there are for junior-level or primary school.

**Revista Linguística: Is Māori language taught as a subject in New Zealand mainstream schools?**

**Hinurewa Poutu:** Māori is taught as a non-compulsory, optional subject in mainstream schools. The issue of whether Māori should be compulsorily taught in all New Zealand schools is one that has long been debated.

**Revista Linguística: What is your position on the issue?**

**Hinurewa Poutu:** I think there are benefits to having at least some Māori offered in mainstream schools, whether it's just basic pronunciation or even simple greetings, because after all it is one of our national languages. The current challenge that many mention against making Māori compulsory in schools is the lack of resources—especially teachers—to be able to teach it effectively. It is a challenge, but I still think it's a good goal to strive for in the future.

**Revista Linguística: You have recently been appointed as a member of the Māori Language Commission. What is the Commission and what does it do?**

**Hinurewa Poutu:** The Māori Language Commission was established in 1987 under the Māori Language Act, which officially recognized Māori as a national language of New Zealand. The Commission's role is to promote the Māori language. It advises government in decisions to do with Māori language and is responsible for promoting the Māori language at a national level. It's also responsible for certifying

interpreters and translators for Te Reo Māori. There are five board members or commissioners and the office has a number of branches. One branch focuses on Māori language research. There is also a fund pool where anybody can apply for funding for community initiatives to do with Te Reo Māori, like for example Māori language events, week-long courses for those who want to improve their competence of Te Reo Māori. We also produce resources such as dictionaries or other materials in Te Reo Māori. These are just some examples of what we do.

**Revista Linguística: The UNESCO criteria for the classification of endangered languages point out that a language becomes endangered when it loses more specialized forms, such as ritual language, chants, ritual wailings, etc. In addition to the Māori-medium schools, are there organized programs of preservation and documentation of more specialized forms of Māori?**

**Hinurewa Poutu:** As Māori, we each associate to our tribes and our marae, which are tribal homes or communal meeting areas. Most marae have a meeting house and there are certain ceremonies that take place at the marae, for example welcoming ceremonies known as powhiri. As part of these there are traditional forms of Māori speech-making or oratory, traditional chants and lullabies and songs. These are very important in terms of our daily cultural practices and are all to be found in and around the marae. The ritual languages associated with funerary rites, in particular, is very specialized. In Māori culture the acknowledging of the spirits of those who pass away is very important and oratory and music and singing are an integral part of the rites. All of these traditions have contributed to the survival of our language, especially the funerary practices because funerals in our culture last three whole days. Despite the extensive Māori migrations from the rural areas to the cities in the 1940s and 1950s, when it comes to sending off someone who has passed away it is still important to travel back to one's marae and attend the traditional burial and take part in the traditional ceremonies. That has changed somewhat in the last twenty years or so, but I think that that has been very important in the preservation of our language. There are also a number of occasions such as weddings, birthdays and tribal gatherings that take place at our marae and these involve speeches and songs in our language.

In terms of other specialist areas, Kapa Haka is the traditional Māori performing arts, and there is a national competition, known as Te Matatini, that is held biannually, as well as a series of regional competitions leading up to the final event. It represents the pinnacle of Māori performing arts and musical composition. All performances are in Te Reo Māori, so all the songs, all the haka and all the lyrics are in Māori. Whether that correlates to people using Māori off-stage is another story (laughs), but I believe events such as this are important for the revival of the language.

**Revista Linguística: One thing that seems to be important for Māori is the concept of mana, of the spiritual value of the language. Can you tell us about it?**

**Hinurewa Poutu:** There certainly is a spiritual element and connection to the language of our ancestors and that's important in the preservation of Te Reo Māori. In fact, one of the well known quotes by Hēmi Henare, who was a prominent Māori leader, is Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori, which

translates as “the language is the essence of Māori mana”, so yes, that’s an important element of our language.

**Revista Linguística:** You have recently defended your doctoral dissertation on the use of Māori language among teenagers and young adults who attend or have attended Māori-medium schools. What prompted you to focus on this particular topic and what were your main findings? Did your study suggest something in particular about the future of Te Reo?

**Hinurewa Poutu:** It’s been thirty years since the establishment of the first Kura Kaupapa Māori schools and this seemed like a good time to reflect about the fruits of that movement and to take a look at how Māori is used among this generation. The recent census showed a decline in Māori language speakers in New Zealand, but very little research so far had focused on young adults and youths who are fluent speakers of Māori, so that’s what drove me to research this topic. Also, I wanted to explore the idea that today’s teenagers and young adults will be the mothers and fathers of tomorrow, and I wanted to find out not only how they use Te Reo in everyday life, but also whether they would consider speaking it to their own children. For most Kura Kaupapa Māori students in New Zealand Māori is not used in the home, because in many cases the parents are not able to speak Māori. However they did send their children to Kura Kaupapa Māori in the hope that they would learn Te Reo and bring it back into the families. In summary, my research focused on the influences on Māori language use, and in particular on finding out when, where and with whom the current generation of Māori speakers use the language. The findings suggest that they use it mainly at school, primarily in the classroom and with teachers, which is in line to what happens in other countries with languages undergoing similar revitalization efforts, such as Ireland and Wales. At school, Māori is used mainly with younger children, either younger siblings or younger children who are just starting at Kōhanga or in the early years of primary school. Māori tends to be used with teachers because teachers are the ones who can speak Māori more fluently than parents or other people in the community, but that doesn’t mean that Māori isn’t being used outside the school. Māori is used alongside English with peers who are also speakers of Māori. Also, amongst the graduates who participated in the research, more than half of the Maori speakers who have left Māori-medium secondary schools are now using Māori most of the time with their own children, so there are signs of intergenerational language transmission that didn’t happen previously. Whereas among my parents’ generation it would have been rare to speak Māori at home, now it looks like at least some my generation of Māori speakers are choosing to do so with their own children, which is promising.

Another key message that came through was to do with the question of how do we get young people to use Te Reo more, especially in informal, everyday social interaction. One of the concerns that was often voiced by the participants, is that Māori language might be becoming a language of ceremony, as the use of Māori tends to be limited to formal and official ceremonies tied to specific circumstances, and when these are over, speakers quite often switch back to English. In this regard, the key message that consistently came through from the study is the need of making Te Reo Māori cool and relevant



to today's youth.

**Revista Linguística: How do you make Māori cool?**

**Hinurewa Poutu:** That's such a good question! (laughs) Most of the Māori language experiences that young people have are in school and that's a very formal environment where they are learning formal subjects and so there is an overall lack of vocabulary when it comes to informal gossip or just chatting with friends, which makes informal relationships difficult to create and maintain in Te Reo for young people. That's something that as teachers we need to be sure to include in the learning experiences we give our students, because there is nowhere else for them to learn this kind of informal language, since quite often their parents can't speak Māori. Other possible sources of informal Māori language might include the media, but while we have a Te Reo channel that is all in Māori, there isn't a single show that targets youth that's entirely in Māori.

One initiative that we've been involved with as a national organization is the running of events to bring youth together in informal settings that are not about school but about socializing. Last year we organized an event where senior high school students from some of the 34 Māori-medium secondary schools in the country came together for a Māori-language only event that included games, an Amazing Race-type activity around Auckland and a workshop run by popular television presenters, performances by Māori language singers and songwriters, all designed to be informal, casual and fun, with an emphasis on the students enjoying themselves and making friends in Te Reo Māori. The feedback we had was very positive. A lot of the teachers that attended and the students themselves noted an increase in the use of Māori with plenty of really good examples of the language being used in social contexts, so that's the kind of positive initiative that we would like to promote again in the future.

**Revista Linguística: Speaking about the need to modernize the language, a common challenge for indigenous language development is the creation of contemporary vocabulary for things such as computers and the like. Does Māori have a way to come up with words for new technologies, or do the speakers tend to borrow these terms from English?**

**Hinurewa Poutu:** That's one of the roles of the Māori Language Commission, to provide advise to translators and to create new words. One example of using traditional Māori words in a modernized context is 'computer' or rorohiko in Māori from roro 'brain', and hiko 'electric'. My research also found examples where teenagers are creating their own words and terminology in Māori – they are completely made up slang terms, such as wekeneru, which is an expression of wonder or delight. It is not a traditional Māori word and teens have created it among themselves. You could say it has now become a legitimate word because I have heard it on some programs on Māori Television and in formal speeches on a marae. It's an example of how youth are making the language 'cool' in their own way and adapting it to their modern experiences. A related

issue has to do with the use of Māori in social media. As part of my study I conducted a national survey that included 478 participants, followed by interviews with 50 participants in the lower north island region, and I found that Māori is not often used in social media such as Facebook or Twitter, and that the decision to use English instead has to do with the perceived audience: If the audience is likely to include English-only speakers, then in order to include them, English is preferred over Māori.

**Revista Linguística:** Finally, we think your expertise and enthusiasm could potentially benefit the indigenous languages of Brazil towards their own preservation efforts. Would you like to come to Brazil, visit some indigenous communities and help organize revitalization programs?

**Hinurewa Poutu:** Thank you very much for the invitation. I think all of us who are striving to revive our languages share that passion, and if it helps others then certainly, yes.