

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 038

FL 027 895

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TITLE "'Whaia Te Reo': Pursuing the Language": How Metaphors Describe Our Relationships with Indigenous Languages.  
INSTITUTION Northern Arizona Univ., Flagstaff.  
PUB DATE 2003-00-00  
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium (9th, Bozeman, MT, June 9-11, 2002). In: Reyner, Jon, Octaviana V. Trujillo, Roberto Luis Carrasco, and Louise Lockard, Eds. Nurturing Native Languages. Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University, 2003.  
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/NNL/> .  
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)  
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Foreign Countries; \*Indigenous Populations; \*Language Maintenance; \*Maori; \*Metaphors; Native Language Instruction; Native Speakers; Uncommonly Taught Languages  
IDENTIFIERS \*Heritage Language; New Zealand

## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the use of metaphors in describing relationships with indigenous languages, focusing on native and newly-fluent speakers of Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Data come from interviews with male and female Maori speakers age 19-44 years who discussed their commitment to becoming fluent speakers of Maori and used a range of metaphors to explain how they perceived the language. Their images were supplemented with information from a variety of other sources, such as contemporary rhetoric, proverbs, and song. The paper discusses four principal metaphors employed in talking about the Maori language, comparing them with similar metaphors used in the Native American situation: language as a treasure, language as a journey, language as water (diving into the water), and language as sustenance (namely food) and as growth. Overall, among the relatively large group of newly fluent speakers of Maori, there was a tendency to emphasize the benefit to the individual of learning the language. These speakers did not see themselves as part of a language revitalization movement, but were learning the language for themselves. However, native speakers who were estranged from the language tended to use metaphors to emphasize the benefits for the language. (Contains 52 references.) (SM)

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# *'Whaia Te Reo: Pursuing the Language'* How Metaphors Describe Our Relationships with Indigenous Languages

Jeanette King

Metaphors are widely employed to describe relationships with indigenous languages. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, native speakers of Maori tend to describe language as an object, whereas newly-fluent speakers of Maori prefer to employ metaphors of process, describing language as a journey, or as food or water. Comparing these metaphors with variants used by Native Americans reveals an inverse relationship: the more speakers and learners there are of a language the more the metaphors focus on the benefits the language has for the individual, and conversely, the fewer speakers and learners there are of a language the more the metaphors employed tend to focus on the benefits language learning has for the future of the language.<sup>1</sup>

## What is a metaphor?

“Metaphors are really statements based on some kind of analogy where two things are compared to each other” (St. Clair, 2000, p. 85). We use metaphors everyday in talking about all sorts of things. When we describe our boss as ‘a big pussycat’ we know he isn’t really a cat, but a pushover, a softy. When someone is ‘going up in the world’ they are not literally moving upwards, but gaining a more advantageous position either through better pay, job, or marriage. These two examples illustrate two of our perceptions about metaphors. Metaphors such as the one about the pussycat are often perceived as extra niceties of a language, not central to meaning or thought processes. If this sort of metaphor wasn’t available to use we would be able to use other words to explain what we mean. Conversely, metaphors like the one about ‘going up in the world’ are so ingrained in our language that we hardly recognize them as metaphors until they are pointed out to us.

Over the last twenty years metaphor has received a great deal of attention in the field of cognitive linguistics. In their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 2) explain that, “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” Work done by them and others shows that our use of metaphor is much more pervasive than we realize (see St. Clair, 2000, p. 86) and there are complex and internally consistent interrelationships between groups of metaphors. These analyses bring to light how metaphor can “create a reality rather than simply to give us a way of conceptualizing a preexisting reality” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 144). In other words metaphors not only reflect our ideas but also shape the way we think. Accordingly, metaphors have an important role in shaping our epistemological framework.

From: J. Reyhner, O. Trujillo, R. L. Carrasco & L. Lockard (eds.). (2003). *Nurturing Native Languages* (pp. 105-124). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.

## *Nurturing Native Languages*

The following discussion is centered on the Maori language, the indigenous language of *Aotearoa*/New Zealand, a group of islands in the South Pacific. The population of *Aotearoa*/New Zealand is nearly 4 million, and 530,000 people, about 15% of the population, are of Maori descent. Approximately 60% of the Maori population are able to speak some Maori (Te Puni Kokiri, 1998). But the majority of Maori adults (84%) have little or no ability in the language. Only 16% (some 18,000 individuals) are proficient speakers, and 73% of these people are aged 45 years or over.

This research stems from my interest in Maori adults of my generation and younger who have grown up as non-speakers of Maori and who have since decided to learn the language and gain a measure of proficiency. It is this generation who have provided most of the impetus for language revitalization programs such as the Maori language immersion preschools, *Kohanga Reo* and subsequent schooling initiatives. The initial idea in these revitalization efforts was for the language to be passed directly from older native speakers to young children. But the reality is that most teachers in these institutions are second-language speakers of Maori. It is these proficient second language speakers, as 'newly-fluent' speakers of Maori, who are the focus of this study because of their importance in language revitalization initiatives.

My data has been gleaned from interviews conducted over the last few years with 32 male and female Maori informants aged between 19 and 44. In discussing their commitment to becoming fluent speakers of Maori they employed a range of metaphors to explain how they perceived the language. Their images have been supplemented with information from a variety of other sources such as contemporary rhetoric, proverbs, and song. The following sections will examine in turn the four principal metaphors employed in talking about the Maori language and compare them with similar metaphors used in the Native American situation in particular. Most, if not all the metaphors mentioned in this paper, are used both in English and the respective indigenous language but, for convenience, will primarily be discussed in English.

### **'He taonga te reo' – language is a treasure**

Maori language is commonly referred to as a *taonga* (treasure).<sup>2</sup> This powerful image has embedded itself in Maori rhetoric and song in recent years, particularly since its enshrinement in New Zealand law in the 1987 Maori Language Act (New Zealand Government, 1987). The preamble to this Act states that Article Two of the Treaty of Waitangi<sup>3</sup> "confirmed and guaranteed to the Maori people, among other things, all their *taonga*" and that "the Maori language is one such *taonga*."

The Maori Language Act instituted the Maori Language Commission, also known as *Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Maori*. This Commission has taken the *taonga* image enshrined in its founding Act and promulgated it widely, using it in titles to several of their publications (*Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo*, 1995-96, 1998, 1998-02). The phrase *he taonga te reo* became the Commission's official slogan for Maori Language Year (*Te Tau o Te Reo Maori*) in 1995. In employing this meta-

phor, language is talked about as being a treasure, *he taonga te reo*, something which has been handed down, *he mea tuku iho*, from the ancestors to present generations, *he taonga tuku iho no nga tipuna*. Indeed it is this principle which is the basis of the *Kohanga Reo* philosophy. *Kohanga Reo* were set up on the basis of the language being handed down from native speaking elders to their grandchildren.

When language is talked of in this way people are urged to hold on and retain this treasure, *kia mau ki te reo Maori*. Sometimes the language is referred to as an adornment to the body, such as a head adornment, pendant or earring, *hei pare kawakawa...mapihi maurea, whakakai marihi*.<sup>4</sup>

In the North American situation, Lang says “our language is a gift from the Indian Gods” (2000, p. 15). Navajo poet Rex Lee Jim makes a similar comment, saying, “the gods have...given you the Navajo language; all you have to do is tap into it” (as quoted in Wallace 1996, p. 106). Greymorning describes Native American languages as being sacred, in that the, “parable [of the Biblical talents] has served to illustrate to me what is happening with our languages. We have been given something sacred, and we recognize its sacredness” (1999, p. 11). The image of language being a gift from the gods is also occasionally used in the Maori situation.

In both the ‘language is a treasure’ and ‘language is a gift’ metaphors language is spoken of as if it were a thing, a tangible object, something capable of being physically passed from one person to another. This idea is encapsulated in the etymology of the phrase ‘heritage’ language which evokes the idea that language is an ‘inheritance’ passed down from generation to generation. Lowenthal (1985, p. 43) describes how important heirlooms, of whatever kind, are to the human psyche, since, “possession of valued relics likewise enhances life.... To have a piece of tangible history links one with its original maker and with intervening owners, augmenting one’s own worth.”

The basic idea behind the metaphor ‘the language is a treasure (or a gift)’ is that language is an object. In other words, this metaphor *reifies* the language. Reify means to convert a concept into a thing, an object with material form. In other words, this metaphor ‘thingifies’ language. Societies often reify certain aspects of their culture, especially as a response to colonization (see Meijl, 1996, p. 313) so it’s not surprising to see language treated in this manner.

It is the image of language as an object which is employed when we talk about marketing indigenous languages, in that marketing views language “as a product” (Cooper quoted in Nicholson, 1997, p. 207). Encapsulated in the idea that language is an object is the prospect that you can lose it, and as Margolin (1999, p. 45) recognizes, there are several different images behind the use of the word ‘loss,’ with the

use of the term “language loss”...evoking both the image of language as a prized object and as a deceased loved one. The solution to the loss of an object is “recovery,” or verbally, “to find” the object. Such terms are not found in the literature, however, implying that this is not the primary image suggested by “loss.”

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In teasing out the different experiences of native speakers and newly fluent speakers we can make a distinction between the way native speakers and second language learners of a language visualize 'losing' a language. This will help clarify the language that is then used for reversing the loss process, for as Margolin notes, the language of recovery differs to that which describes the loss.

Sujata Bhatt (1997, p. 32) in a poem about her first language, Gujarati, expresses the pain of loss of a native speaker when she says,

You ask me what I mean  
by saying I have lost my tongue.  
I ask you, what would you do  
if you had two tongues in your mouth,  
...  
And if you lived in a place where you had to  
speak a foreign tongue –  
your mother tongue would rot,  
rot and die in your mouth

Here Bhatt describes her language as a prized object, literally the tongue in her mouth. As a native speaker she finds that she 'loses' her language when she isn't able to use it. She explains the word 'loss' as meaning 'dying,' evoking the image of a deceased loved one.

Bhatt goes on in the poem to discover that her native language is not dead after all, as one night, as she is dreaming,

it grows back, a stump of a shoot  
...  
the bud opens, the bud opens in my mouth,  
it pushes the other tongue aside.  
Everytime I think I have forgotten,  
I think I have lost the mother tongue,  
it blossoms out of my mouth.

Her 'dead' language comes to life again and grows back. That is, after she 'loses' her language, she doesn't go looking for it, it finds her again unexpectedly. Her use of the word 'loss' must be understood in the context of 'dying' with the reverse process being 'coming back to life,' as her language does.

Second language learners are also affected by language loss, but their experience of this loss is different to that of native speakers, and they use the word in a different way. Donna Awatere Huata, a member of the 1970s protest group *Nga Tamatoa*, and now a Member of Parliament in New Zealand, recalls the situation which galvanized her and others to political action,

You have to lose something before you value it,  
And we were the first generation that really lost it all.

It was the fact that Hana couldn't speak Maori language,  
her loss,  
the land loss that we all had,  
the cultural links that we were all by that stage losing.  
We were so aware of what we'd lost,  
and in the losing of it was that rage,  
that we didn't want to lose it. (Awatere Huata, 2001)

Many of those in *Nga Tamatoa* didn't have the language to 'lose' like a native speaker does. The loss Awatere Huata refers to the loss of not having the language in the first place, of being bereft. Therefore the solution to this type of loss is to go looking for the language. The language will not rise up again spontaneously and unconsciously within those who don't have the language as it can for a native speaker. Second language learners must determinedly and consciously take action to find and learn their language. Hence the images they use in countering that loss will encapsulate these ideas, as we will see below.

Another distinction between native speakers and second language learners can also be drawn around the 'language is an object' metaphor, at least in the situation with the Maori language. This metaphor can be traced back through the decades in New Zealand rhetoric and the beginnings of the idea emerged in the 1920s, a time when most Maori adults were first-language speakers of Maori. Continuing through to the present day those who use this metaphor are largely native speakers of the Maori language. The Maori language is indeed something that has been handed down personally to them. While the newly-fluent Maori informants in this study would generally agree that language is a treasure, they didn't use this metaphor spontaneously in their interviews in describing their own interaction with the Maori language. If we deconstruct the 'language is an object' metaphor we can see why this image doesn't fit their experience. The 'language is an object' metaphor implies:

1. that language is immutable and timeless;
2. that language can be passed down like an heirloom from ancestors to their descendants. In other words, it describes intergenerational transmission.

The first point runs counter to the experience of the newly-fluent speaking informants who, as we shall see, describe language as a process or transformation. This transformation is an internal, personal one. The metaphors they employ describe change, which is in conflict with the idea of an immutable and timeless object.

With regard to the second point above, since the informants in this study are newly-fluent speakers, they have not acquired any appreciable fluency in the language directly from their parents or extended family. They have learned the language later in life as an adult. Intergenerational transmission, therefore, is not part of their experience. Accordingly, the 'language is a treasure' metaphor

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does not resonate as strongly with them. The three metaphors preferred by my newly-fluent Maori-speaking informants have the following format, in that they describe:

- a. an initial state of languagelessness,
- b. an engagement with the language, and
- c. a continuing relationship with the language.

As St. Clair (2000, p. 99) notes, the tension between epistemologies which focus on products rather than processes has ancient antecedents. The Roman culture, expressed in the Latin language was “part of a product culture. They saw things” whereas Greek language “deals with process. It belongs to a process culture.”

In pointing out how metaphors which reify indigenous languages can be used to remove ownership and control from speakers, Fettes (1997, pp. 303-4) contends that “a theory of language renewal must begin with the speakers, with people ‘doing language’ together in meaningful ways.” In other words, process and engagement with the heritage language is important.

In the following sections we will investigate the three metaphors of choice used by my newly-fluent Maori-speaking informants, comparing them to the Native American experience.

### **‘*Whaia te huarahi*’ – following the path**

One of the most popular metaphors used by Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand describes language as a journey. There are two versions of this metaphor. In the first, language is seen as a pathway, *huarahi*. Before learning the language informants speak of being lost, *ngaro*, or not on the right path, *kaore i runga i te huarahi tika*, or deviating from the path, *kotiti haere*. In learning the language they see themselves as following the language, *whai i te reo*, or ‘the path,’ *whai i te huarahi*. This ‘path’ is their ongoing engagement with the language and culture. The pervasiveness of this metaphor is reflected in the fact that the image of a person following a path features on the cover of the newly revised main adult Maori language textbooks (Moorfield, 2001a & b).

Journey metaphors seem common in many cultures, but as Ahlers notes, sometimes the manifestations can be different. She cites the Hupa journey metaphor, which, unlike the Maori one, is not linear and ongoing, but is circular with the traveler returning back to where they started (Ahlers, 1999, p. 61-2). The circular nature of the journey metaphor seems common to the Native American experience, and language is cited as being a vehicle to completing the circle. Norma Jean Pole (1995, p. 40) describes native language as being “words to mend the circle of life.”

Liz Dominguez, in describing her great-great-great-grandmother, Maria, recording her Chumash language with Harrington, imagines Maria thinking at the time that “maybe one day, as sure as the circle will complete itself there will be one of my relations that will find these treasures” (1998, p. 17).

The idea of a more linear journey in which the indigenous person treads the steps of the ancestors is mentioned both amongst Australian Aborigines (Patrick McConvell, personal communication, June 11, 2002) and Native Americans, as shown in this section of a poem by Malcolm Benally (1996, p. 139), which says,

Grandfather, bring the path which is made of corn pollen and  
I will no longer walk in two worlds  
but in your path

The image of 'following the ancestors' is also used occasionally with Maori language,

*te whai i te huarahi o oku matua*  
following the path of my elders

But on most occasions the thing people are following is the language, culture, or 'the path.'

The relation with ancestors frequently occurs in the Native American situation with Native Americans seeing themselves as following along behind 'the ones who've gone before' with language being a bridge to the right 'way,' as Fillerup explains, when describing a Navajo immersion program as providing,

a medium through which Navajo children can communicate and thereby connect with the Elders. This linguistic bridge to the past will also form a bridge to the future as subsequent generations of Navajo children learn to speak, read and write the language of their ancestors. (2000, p. 26)

Rex Lee Jim explains "that his goal is to use Navajo language in everything he does, so he can reach the right way" (as quoted in Wallace, 1996, p. 106). Indeed, the word 'way' features strongly in Navajo epistemology with ceremonies such as the Blessing Way, the Mountain Way and the Shooting Way.

These ceremonies are referred to as 'ways' because they involve journeys. Campbell (1988, p. 101-2) describes the initiate participating in the Blessing Way Ceremony as identifying with the "mythological adventure of the pollen path in its threshold crossings into and through a sacred space and out into the world transformed." Those witnessing the ceremony also partake in the journey but "their participation will have been not of identification, but of a relationship...whereas the initiate...will have become identified with the adventure."

The idea of the 'way' is deeply ingrained in other American Indian epistemologies. The religion of the Native American Church is also known as the Peyote Way and the leader of ceremonies is "often referred to as the Roadman because he leads the group along the Peyote Road (that is, the Peyotist way of life) to salvation" (Slotkin, 1975, p. 97).



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St. Clair (2000, p. 92) notes that amongst oral cultures that the “legitimization of knowledge is commonly referred to as the way of the people.” As we have seen above there is a similar phrase used in the Maori experience *whai i te huarahi* which refers to following a pathway. Although more deeply rooted in Native American epistemology the basic idea is the same. Both refer to a way of living which is more than just behavior but a way of being, a way of experiencing the world.

In the New Zealand situation, there is a second version of the ‘language is a journey’ metaphor in which the informant or the language is a canoe, *waka*. Informants speak of either getting onto the canoe, *piki/eke ki runga i te waka*, and/or heading their canoe in a forward direction, *ahu whakamua*, or in a straight line, *haere tika*. Again, the informants see themselves as following a pathway, a journey. Obviously, with the importance of water transport in an island country such as Aotearoa/New Zealand it is not surprising that canoe imagery is used.

In considering the journey metaphor with respect to newly-fluent speakers of Maori, it seems that the destination, while important, is not the prime focus. Informants place more importance on the process of moving along the pathway, undertaking, and continuing to undertake the journey. They talk of ‘pursuing’ the language in a lifelong journey and it seems that, at least at this point, they don’t envisage actually reaching the destination. The purpose, or the process, is the destination.

While the journey metaphor is also used in the Native American situation, there the emphasis is on the circular nature of the journey and of the purpose being to join or close the circle and follow ‘the way’ of the ancestors. Despite this difference, emphasis is also on the experiential process.

### **‘Ruku ki te wai’ – dive into the water**

In this metaphor, which is not as commonly used, language is seen as water. Newly-fluent speakers of Maori describe their involvement with the language in terms of diving into the water, *ruku ki te wai*, water which is often described as deep, *hohonu*. They talk about being thoroughly immersed in the water, *rumaki*, and swimming, *e kaukau ana*.

The metaphor of ‘language as water’ seems particularly related to the idea of immersion. Over a decade ago, the term ‘bilingual’ in the New Zealand education context was almost completely replaced by the words ‘immersion’ and its Maori equivalent ‘*rumaki*.’ This change occurred in recognition that the word ‘bilingual’ is typically applied to a program which is designed to move children away from using their heritage language. The purpose of immersion programs is to enhance and expand children’s ability in the Maori language (Keegan, 1996, p. 1). The widespread use of the word ‘immersion’ in the education context has obviously precipitated the use of this metaphor in describing the newly-fluent speaker’s experience.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate the origins of the metaphors discussed here for they are a complex mix of traditional Maori belief, heavily influenced by Christianity. A mix, one suspects, that is probably com-

mon in the Native American experience. But I would like to dwell for a moment on the biblical aspects of this particular metaphor, where language is seen as water in which the speaker is totally immersed.

Being immersed in water conjures up the image of adult baptism. Sheldrake notes that

the Baptists retain the practice of baptizing adults through the ritual of total immersion, and... place...[great] emphasis on the experience of being born again. Indeed, their form of Christianity is centered on this conversion experience. (1991, p. 188)

Similar to the baptism experience, many of the informants in this study have found their experience in becoming a fluent speaker of Maori to be life-changing and enhancing. Several informants became involved with the Maori language through alcohol and drug rehabilitation Twelve Step programs which are spiritual and practical life-changing experiences. The similarity between language learning and recovery has been noted by many, including (Reyhner, 1999) and Antone (2002). On a continuum there are obviously similarities between the recovery experience and a similar sort of experience that often accompanies becoming a fluent second-language speaker of a heritage language. As Antone (2002, p. 52) writes:

Some [Native people], however, were able to steer themselves away from the drug-and-alcohol road and find wholeness and identity.... They found that they needed to learn their ways and learn their own languages from the Elders and to practice the ceremonies performed long ago by their grandparents. This was the new way to regain the lost identity of this new-found people.<sup>5</sup>

The ability of one's language and culture to help prevent social ills is also commented on by Dawn Stiles (1997), who concludes that successful programs need to link language and culture and that successful programs can fight gang activity, alcohol and drug abuse, and high dropout rates in indigenous communities. Similarly Rex Lee Jim believes "that Navajo language can prevent alcoholism and other problems" (quoted in Wallace, 1996, p. 106). What this link suggests is that the individual's experience with the indigenous language can be akin to the sort of spiritual change which occurs in the life of a recovering addict, in that the prime focus and motivation is a personal, spiritual and emotional relationship, in this case, with the language and culture. The significance of this focus on the individual will be discussed again later.

***'Ka whangaia kia tipu'* – being fed and growing**

The fourth metaphor which is used widely in New Zealand, expresses language as sustenance (namely food) and also as growth. My newly-fluent Maori-speaking informants talked about how before learning Maori language they were

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hungry, *matekai*, *hiakai*, or not being fed the language, *kaore i whangaia*. In learning the language they are being fed, *e whangaia ana*, and becoming alive and healthy, *e ora ana*. Informants see the possibility of, in turn, feeding their own children or school pupils, (if they are teachers), with the language.

In this schema the informant's original diet without the language was lacking; Maori language is seen as a special food necessary to their survival. This metaphor fits in with the concept of *Kohanga Reo*, which are, literally 'language nests.' The purpose of a real nest is to raise baby birds. When we think of nests we most often envisage them full of hatchlings vigorously demanding food. Translating this image we see that a *Kohanga Reo* is a place where babies and young children are 'fed' the language.

The idea of one's indigenous language being some sort of food, especially a spiritual food, also features in descriptions of Native American languages, with Richard Littlebear (1990, p. 8) seeing "our native languages nurturing our spirits and hearts." The result of being so fed is a feeling of completeness and health. Walters (quoted in Wallace, 1996, p. 106) feels that "the ability to speak language is critical to being whole and well."

Sometimes it's not the person who is nurtured to health but the language. Littlebear (1999, p. 1) notes in saying that "if we just spoke our languages, all of our languages would be healthier." We can apply Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970) to the use of this metaphor describing language as food.<sup>6</sup> His hierarchy ranks needs that motivate human behavior, with physiological needs such as food, water, air and heat being most important to people, followed by the need for safety, then belongingness, esteem and self-actualization. Under this theory, physiological needs are more powerful than safety needs, and so on.

While, strictly speaking, language needs probably fall into the belongingness category, what is interesting about the 'language as food' metaphor is that it metaphorically moves language up into the most basic of needs categories. That is, in using this metaphor people are stating very categorically how important language is to them – it could not be higher, in that physiological needs must be satiated before all others.

When we need food, "if the body lacks some chemical, the individual will tend (in an imperfect way) to develop a specific appetite or partial hunger for that missing food element" (Maslow, 1970, p. 36). This describes the often-noted determination and commitment of those involved in learning their indigenous language.

In a second related manifestation of the 'language is food' metaphor, the newly-fluent Maori-speaking informants talked about 'growth', as if they themselves were plants. Before learning the Maori language they were not growing, *kaore i tipu*, but learning the language has made them grow, *e tipu ana*, blossom and flower, *e puawai ana*.

Sometimes the language, or desire to learn the language, was seen as a seed which had been planted and is growing inside them, *i whakatongia te kakano*, and it is the seed which is growing, blossoming or flowering inside them. This image is related to a well known Maori whakatauki, or proverb, which states,

*E kore au e ngaro; te kakano i ruia mai i Rangiatea*  
I shall never be lost; the seed which was sown from Rangiatea<sup>7</sup>  
(Mead & Grove, 2001, p. 30-31)

The meaning being that Maori identity through genealogy from time immemorial will provide succor in today's changing world.

The image of the language learner being a growing seed was used on the cover of the main Maori language textbook, the *Te Whanake* (literally, 'the growing') series. The cover of the first book, *Te Kakano* ('the seed') features a seed with eyes under the earth just beginning to sprout (Moorfield, 1988). The soil surrounding the seed consists of words and phrases in Maori. The image is telling us that the seed, that is, the learner, will grow in this fertile soil of the language. The second book, *Te Pihinga* ('the sprouting') shows the seed sprouting out of the earth (Moorfield, 1989). On the third book, *Te Mahuri* ('the sapling'), the seed is now a sapling, rooted firmly in the soil of the language (Moorfield, 1992). On the final book, *Te Kohure* ('the maturing') the plant is now a fully formed flowering native tree (Moorfield, 1996).

The growth metaphor, as employed in the situation of the Maori language, places emphasis on the individual's growth. This image has also been used in the Native American situation where Cheyenne people without the language have been described as empty husks, which would presumably be plump and full if they had access to the language. Northern Cheyenne elders opine that when children

reach us, when they are born, they are going to be relegated to being mere husks, empty shells. They are going to look Cheyenne, have Cheyenne parents but they won't have the language which is going to make them truly Cheyenne. (quoted by Littlebear in Reyhner, 1997, p. vii)

Most commonly though the 'language is growth' metaphor appears in other indigenous language contexts with quite a different application. We have seen its use earlier in the Sujata Bhatt poem where the poet describes her native language, atrophied through lack of use, growing back and blossoming in her mouth. In this case what is growing is Bhatt's language, Gujarati, whereas in the previous examples it is the learner who is growing.

Fishman (1996b, p. 197-98) in describing the struggle in his family, and those of other 'activists' over several generations to revitalize Hebrew, quotes the image from the Bible of the plowman being overtaken by the reaper,

And the planters [will be overtaken] by the ones treading the grapes, new wine will drip from the mountains and from all the hills, they will plant new vineyards and drink their wine. They will make gardens and eat their fruits.<sup>8</sup>

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That is, the hard work of language revitalization as part of a group, will come to fruition and bear fruit to the community at large. The people aren't the fruits but they will benefit from the fruits, that is, language revitalization.

Another use of the image of seeds has also been used in the Native American situation. House and Reyhner (1996, p. 143) note some of the strengths of adult language programs describing "small classes as seeds with the likelihood of rich harvests in the future." Here it is the class which is the seed which will grow and flourish in the future. The harvest mentioned is the revitalization of the respective language.

Here we see a parallel between the way a native speaker like Bhatt and those involved in Native American language revitalization and Hebrew often use the metaphor of growth. They tend to apply the image to the language, focussing on the growth of the language and on revitalization benefits for the ongoing health of the language. The benefit to the individual is not stressed as much as in the New Zealand situation where the growth image is applied to the individual language learner.

Some language activists go so far to completely identify themselves with their languages. In her workshop at the Ninth Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Conference, L. Frank Manriquez introduced herself by saying, "my language is extinct, you are looking at an extinct person." It became clear that what she meant was because she can now speak some of her language, her language is not extinct. In other words she represents her language, and is a vehicle for it. This is not to say that the benefits of language learning are not applied to individuals in the Native American situation. Nancy Steele (personal communication, June 12, 2002) describes how involvement in the Master-Apprentice program often bestows the benefits of a revitalized life both on the elders and apprentices.

Leanne Hinton, talks about the personal benefits of the Master-Apprentice program in "bring[ing] the generations together" and in making the elders feel valued through getting "the care, attention, and respect...that he or she so richly deserves" (1994, p. 14) and "reducing the 'generation gap'" (1999, p. 10). However, when using the image of 'growth' there is a substantial focus in the Native American rhetoric on the growth of the language, culture, or people as a whole rather than individually.

### **Discussion**

For those of us involved in revitalizing indigenous languages we can recognize the symbiotic relationship between language and individuals in the adage:

language revitalizes the person  
the person revitalizes the language

No matter what the situation we can see that both processes occur in language revitalization. In being involved in language revitalization through speaking a indigenous language both the individual and the language benefit. However, in studying how we use metaphors to describe our relationship with indigenous

languages we see that in different situations one part of this maxim will be stressed more than the other.

Amongst the relatively numerous newly-fluent speakers of Maori in New Zealand, there is a tendency to emphasize the benefit to the individual of learning the language. The metaphors such speakers employ emphasize their individual, personal and on-going relationship with the language, a relationship which has transformed them, either through being fed and growing, or through following a new path, or being immersed in the water that is that language.

When asked why they wanted to learn Maori, respondents in a national survey consistently replied “because we are Maori, because our children are Maori” (Te Puni Kokiri, 2002, p. 31). They are not primarily motivated by personal responsibility for the language but by perceived benefits to themselves as individuals, and their families. With so many Maori learning the language, survival of the language does not depend on the efforts of any one individual. Therefore learners will express their motivation in a more personal way.

Similarly, when asked, my newly-fluent Maori-speaking informants did not see themselves as part of a language revitalization ‘movement.’ They were learning the language for themselves, as one informant, Rau (a pseudonym), described in this exchange:

Interviewer: Do you feel like you’re part of a movement or not?

Rau: No. This is for me. *Noku tenei ao* [This is my world]. Mm. *So noku tenei reo* [this is my language].

Interviewer: So you see it sort of as a personal reclaiming?

Rau: Yeah.

Rau indicated that learning the Maori language was her life choice, a decision made for her own benefit and that of her children.

Conversely, when native speakers who are estranged from their language talk about the language (as in Sujata Bhatt’s poem and in situations, such as that which prevails with regard to many Native American languages, where there are few speakers) the emphasis of the metaphors tends to be on the benefits for the language.

Hathorn (1997, p. 232) reports from a Echota Cherokee language survey, when asked why respondents wanted to learn Cherokee they rated “keeping Cherokee tradition alive” most frequently as their primary incentive. That is, respondents recognized and emphasized their role in keeping their language and culture alive. Indeed, in the Californian Master-Apprentice program, one criteria for selection of apprentices is their commitment to passing on the knowledge they will learn to others (Nancy Steele, personal communication, June 12, 2002). In these sorts of language situations, with smaller numbers of speakers and learners, any learner will be quite aware of their role in revitalizing their language.

Fishman has also commented on how people feel a responsibility towards their language, and say,

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“I should do something. I should do more for it. I haven’t done the right thing by it. I’m glad I’m working for it,” as if there were a kind of a moral commitment here and a moral imperative. (Fishman, 1996a, p. 83).

In other words, with regard to metaphors employed in describing relationships with indigenous languages, the more people that know and are learning the language, the more the beneficial effect on the individual is emphasized. On the other hand, the fewer people that know and are learning the language the more the beneficial effect on the language is emphasized.

Another example is provided in the genesis of the nomenclature for the Californian ‘Breath of Life: Silent No More’ program to resurrect languages which have had no speakers for several generations. L. Frank Manriquez in a workshop on the Californian language situation at the Ninth Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Conference told how when the program began, the senior linguist, Leanne Hinton, wrote a poem about the devoted individuals working hard to resurrect their languages, describing them as a kind of ‘Lonely Hearts Language Club’ (Hinton, 1992, p. 31). However, in choosing a final name for the program the participants themselves preferred the name ‘Breath of Life: Silent No More.’ Here the language is likened to a deceased loved one, being brought back to life and speaking again. What is interesting is that the participants themselves chose a name for their program which emphasized the benefits to the language, in preference to an image centered on the experience of the individual.

Advocates like Timoti Karetu, former Maori Language Commissioner, continually emphasize the importance of the individual’s effort in revitalizing the language, saying that “the revitalization of a language is dependent on the will of its speakers” (Karetu, quoted in Kirkness, 2002, p. 19). The present Maori Language Commissioner, Patu Hohepa, similarly states that “the ultimate moral responsibility for [the Maori language’s] continuation as a spoken language is with us who are Maori.... Use it or lose it.” (Hohepa, 2000, p. 14).

Although this rhetoric is focussed at the individual, it may be falling on deaf ears when addressed to newly-fluent speakers of Maori as it stresses the importance of the individual’s role in the future of the language, an emphasis, as we have seen, not recognized by these people themselves. In the Native American situation the fewer speakers there are of a language, the more one is aware of the importance of one’s individual efforts, hence the focus on the wider perspective, the survival of one’s indigenous language.

In determining language promotion strategies in New Zealand it may be beneficial to differentiate the experiences of different sets of speakers in differently targeted campaigns. For the native speaker of Maori the emphasis should be on the image of language as a treasure and passing the language on, and the role of native speakers in ensuring the Maori language survives. That is, their important role in intergenerational transmission should be emphasized.

Intergenerational transmission has been an important emphasis in New Zealand with recent research saying that it “lies at the heart of the overall move-

ment to revitalize the Maori language” (Te Puni Kokiri, 2002, p. 4). According to Fishman’s (1991, p. 395) influential eight stage schema, the Maori language has jumped from level 7 (limited use of the language amongst older generations) to level 4 (setting up schooling in the Maori language in both mainstream and Maori-controlled schools). In concentrating on schooling initiatives, fostering the use of the Maori language intergenerationally in the community and at home (level 6) has received little direct attention. Fishman (1996b) describes this intergenerational vernacular interaction as the key to successful revitalization. Current rhetoric in New Zealand emphasizes this important point in saying that it “is most important that children start learning and speaking Maori in their homes as their first language so that it becomes their mother tongue” (Hohepa, 2000, p. 14).

The newly-fluent Maori-speaking adult also has a key role in intergenerational transmission as parents of the children being educated in the Maori language schooling system. But the strategy for fostering their participation in language revitalization might benefit from emphasizing their experience of being empowered and transformed spiritually and emotionally through their involvement with and use of the Maori language. The metaphors newly-fluent speakers of Maori use themselves are metaphors of process. They cover the whole process of being without Maori language through to an ongoing engagement with the language. They recognize that being a second language learner of an indigenous language means that you are engaged in lifelong learning. That is, the metaphors they employ perfectly encapsulate the newly-fluent speaker’s experience. As Hohepa notes, newly-fluent speakers are important as “the statistical group with the most needs is in the 20-55 age ranges” (Hohepa, 2000, p. 12).

We don’t really know as yet how younger speakers brought up with the language envisage the Maori language. A recent campaign ‘*Te Hono ki te Reo*’ (which includes television advertisements in Maori language) aims at the younger demographic, focussing on how ‘it’s cool to *korero*’ (it’s cool to speak the language) (Simpson, 2000, p. 1).

## **Conclusion**

We have seen how metaphors are important in expressing relationships with indigenous languages, in shaping and reflecting how we envisage that language. Metaphors reflect the unique experience of speakers and, accordingly, native speakers, second-language learners and those working with languages with few speakers will use different metaphors in different ways.

In New Zealand the current metaphors used with regard to the Maori language fall into two categories:

1. The ‘language is a treasure’ metaphor reifies the language. This is an important metaphor in the vaunted aim of returning to a state of intergenerational transmission. As we have seen, this metaphor may well appeal more to a native speaker as it reflects their experience of receiving



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the language from parents and elders in a community situation. This metaphor is also used in the Native American situation in the form 'language is a gift from the gods.'

2. The language is food or growth, or a journey, or water metaphors are used to reflect engagement with the language in a personal, conscious relationship. These metaphors reflect the experience of the newly-fluent speaker of Maori in New Zealand and, as metaphors of process and transformation, are important in stressing the ongoing, transformative nature of language learning.

Both the food/growth and journey metaphors are also used to refer to Native American languages. The Native American journey metaphor is most often circular rather than linear, reflecting Native American epistemology. The journey metaphor is expressed culturally in ceremonies and religious practices called 'ways' which reflect experiential 'ways of being' similar to what is referred to in the Maori situation with the phrase *whai i te huarahi* (following the path).

The use of the 'growth' metaphor in the North American situation is slightly different to its use in New Zealand where it is the individual who 'grows' in learning the language. In Native American languages it is most often the languages themselves which are described as 'growing.' With many Native American languages having low numbers of speakers it is not surprising that emphasis is placed more on the benefits accruing to the individual language, and that the metaphors used emphasize the importance of the speaker's role in revitalizing the language.

While the 'language as water' metaphor does not seem to be used in the Native American situation, its links with ideas of spiritual transformation reveal that both Maori and Native American languages have perceived benefits in protecting people and helping them recover from social ills such as drug and alcohol dependency.

Studying how we use metaphor to talk about indigenous languages reveals differences between various languages according to the number of speakers or learners a language has. Differences also exist between types of speakers and learners, such as native speakers and newly-fluent speakers. Such analysis can help us understand epistemological underpinnings to people's relationships with their indigenous languages and more precisely focus language revitalization strategies, particularly with regard to marketing and rhetoric.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Acknowledgements to those who attended this workshop at the Ninth Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Conference and contributed comparisons with the Native American experience. I am obliged to Joyce Silverthorne for the apt term 'newly-fluent' to describe a second-language speakers who have gained a significant measure of fluency. Thanks also to Wayne Holm for contributing the word 'thingify.' University of Canterbury research grant U6265 enabled field work vital to this research.

- <sup>2</sup>The word *taonga* means “property, anything highly prized” (Williams, 1971, p. 381).
- <sup>3</sup>The Treaty of Waitangi is the founding document of the nation of New Zealand, signed in 1840 by Maori chiefs and a representative of the British Crown.
- <sup>4</sup>These lines are from a song by Te Kahautu Maxwell, entitled *Nei ra te kaupapa*.
- <sup>5</sup>Note the use of the journey metaphor in this quotation with the words ‘steer away,’ ‘road,’ and ‘new way.’
- <sup>6</sup>See Walker (1993) for an application of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to language shift. Also Palmer (1997, pp. 274-5).
- <sup>7</sup>Ra’iatea (a version of Rangiatea) is an island in the Society Group.
- <sup>8</sup>Amos, 9:13-14.

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