Implicit Language Acquisition and Intergenerational Shifts in New Zealand English: A Case Study of Te Reo Māori Loanwords

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This study investigates the phenomenon of implicit language acquisition in the context of New Zealand English (NZE) speakers' exposure to the Māori language, focusing on phonological and lexical knowledge across generations (Panther et al., 2024). The research examines this issue within the broader framework of te reo Māori revitalization since the 1970s, examining the differing levels of language exposure and access to resources present in the daily lives of different generations (Benton, 2015; Calude, Miller, & Pagel, 2020). Through qualitative interviews with sixteen participants from four generations—Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z—the study aims to examine how factors such as education, media, and social interactions influence the implicit acquisition of Māori loanwords, both in frequency of use and accuracy of pronunciation.

Preliminary findings reveal that younger generations, particularly Gen Z, demonstrate a more diverse use of Māori loanwords and exhibit more authentic pronunciation compared to older generations, who tend to prefer anglicised forms. This generational variation reflects the shifting sociolinguistic environment in New Zealand, where younger speakers benefit from both implicit exposure and explicit instruction in te reo Māori. Additionally, participants' educational backgrounds and professional contexts, particularly in educational or governmental roles, are key factors influencing the adoption of Māori pronunciation across all generations.

The findings highlight the broader implications of implicit language acquisition in multilingual contexts, suggesting that passive exposure to minority or second languages can significantly shape linguistic knowledge and usage. This has potential applications for language preservation efforts worldwide, where implicit learning can be leveraged to foster bilingualism and enhance cultural integration through media, education, and social interaction.

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Biography

Laura Gage is a recent graduate of MA English Studies program at Vilnius University's Faculty of Philology in Lithuania, originally hailing from New Zealand. Her research interests lie in language contact and phonology, with her recent work focusing on the sociolinguistic landscape of New Zealand English and te reo Māori in her native country. When she is not writing, she is busy discovering new cafes in Vilnius and exploring beautiful Lithuania. E-mail: laurak.gage@outlook.com

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