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The particle *ai* in New Zealand Māori

Ian Hunter

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Abstract

This study looked at the functions and uses of the problematic particle *ai* in New Zealand Māori. *Ai* is described primarily as a verbal particle. It appears in a number of seemingly disparate constructions, has no parallel in English, and there has never been a satisfactory explanation of all its uses.

The data consists of a large corpus of sentences containing *ai* that were extracted from selected texts written by native speakers from as early as the 19th Century up until 2005. Sentences were also solicited from fluent speakers.

Analysis of the data and discussions with native speakers led to the conclusion that *ai* exists as two distinct particles, which were labelled habitual *ai*, and anaphoric *ai.*

Habitual *ai* is a verbal marker that confers habitual aspect on its verb. It was found that it is mainly used by speakers from the Eastern regions of the North Island.

Anaphoric *ai* refers back to some element earlier in the discourse. It has two forms, labelled resumptive *ai* and resultative *ai*.

Resumptive *ai* is an anaphoric pro-form that resumes a specific noun phrase in its clause. It was found to have a grammatical function. When resumptive *ai* was deleted from its clause consultants judged the results ill-formed. An example of a construction with resumptive *ai* is a sentence with an adverbial of reason located before the verb.

Resultative *ai* locates its clause in prior discourse, making a causal link between its clause and the prior element. It was found to have a mainly lexical function. When resultative *ai* was deleted from its clause consultants judged that the meaning had altered and that the causal link was weakened or lost. An example of a construction with resultative *ai* is a purpose clause which follows an action that has been carried out for that specific purpose.

This thesis provides a unified explanation for all uses of *ai*. It also accounts for previously unexplained appearances, by showing that one form of *ai* may occur in environments restricted to another. Its appearance in non-verbal phrases are accounted for, and observations have been made about changes in its use over time.

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Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iii

Index of Figures and Tables viii

List of Abbreviations ix

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION 1

1 Introduction 1

1.1 On Māori and its dialects 2

1.2 The particle *ai* 4

1.3 The research methodology 7

1.4 The database and corpus 9

Chapter 2: A MĀORI GRAMMAR 11

2 Introduction 11

2.1 Word classes 12

2.1.1 Particles 12

2.1.2 Bases 13

2.2 The phrase 16

2.2.1 Verb Phrases 16

2.2.2 Noun Phrases 17

2.2.3 Prepositional Phrases 18

2.3 Order amongst the post-head modifiers 20

2.4 Semantic roles 34

2.5 Grammatical functions 35

2.6 Sentence structure 36

2.6.1 Simple non-verbal sentences 36

2.6.2 Simple verbal sentences 37

2.6.3 Marked verbal sentences 38

2.6.4 Complex sentences 42

2.7 Emphasis: focus and topic 46
2.7.1 Fronting subjects for emphasis 47
2.7.2 Fronting Obliques for emphasis 48
2.8 Conclusion 50
Chapter 3: ACCOUNTS OF *AI* 51
3 Introduction 51
3.1 The uses of *ai* 52
3.2 Accounts of *ai* in Māori grammars 55
3.3 An hypothesis to account for all uses of *ai* 61
Chapter 4: RESUMPTIVE *AI* 63
4 Introduction 63
4.1 Relative clauses 64
4.1.1 Background 64
4.1.2 The relative clauses database 65
4.1.3 The strategies 66
4.2 Fronted constituents 91
4.2.1 Background 91
4.2.2 The fronted constituent database 93
4.2.3 Reason/Cause 94
4.2.4 Time 113
4.2.5 Means 127
4.2.6 Location 134
4.3 Location emphasis 138
4.3.1 Background 138
4.3.2 The construction 141
4.4 Subsequent / Dependent action 154
4.5 Conclusion for resumptive *ai* 156
Chapter 5: RESULTATIVE *AI* 161

5 Introduction 161
5.1 Purpose clauses 162
5.1.1 Background 162
5.1.2 *Hei* purpose adverbials 163
5.1.3 *Ki te* or *kia* 165
5.1.4 *Ki te* purpose clauses 166
5.1.5 *Kia* purpose clauses 169
5.1.6 *Kia .. ai* purpose clauses 172
5.2 *Ka .. ai* clauses 186
5.2.1 Background 186
5.2.2 The *ka .. ai* database 187
5.2.3 *ka .. ai* and dependent action 188
5.2.4 *ka .. ai* and fronted adverbials 196
5.2.5 *ka .. ai* and result clauses 198
5.3 Result clauses 201
5.3.1 Background 201
5.3.2 The result clauses database 203
5.3.3 Result clauses with *ai* 203
5.3.4 Result clauses without *ai* 206
5.3.5 The *ka* or *ai* form? 208
5.3.6 Resultative *ai* and 'cataphoric reference' 210
5.4 Conclusions for resultative *ai* 213
Chapter 6: HABITUAL *AI*; NON-VERBAL *AI* 216
6 Introduction 216
6.1 Habitual *ai* 217
6.1.1 Background 217
6.1.2 Habitual aspect without *ai* 218
6.1.3 Habitual aspect with *ai* 222

6.1.4 Conclusions for habitual *ai* 231
6.2 Non-verbal constructions and *ai* 233
6.2.1 Background 233
6.2.2 *Te* as verbal marker 234
6.2.3 The non-verbal *ai* database 239
6.2.4 *Ai* in time nominalisations 240
6.2.5 *Te* with resumptive *ai* 242
6.2.6 *Te* with resultative *ai* 245
6.2.7 *Ai* in other non-verbal constructions 246
6.2.8 Conclusions for *ai* in non-verbal phrases 248
6.3 An idiomatic expression with *ai* 249
Chapter 7: THE DISTRIBUTION OF *AI* 251
7 Introduction 251
7.1.1 *Ai* in VPs 251
7.1.2 *Ai* in narratives 254
7.1.3 The frequency of *ai* 256
Chapter 8: CONCLUSIONS 259
Resumptive *ai* 260
Resultative *ai* 261
Habitual *ai* 262
Further Work 262
Appendix 265
Classical narratives 265
Modern narratives 266
Other sources of *ai* sentences 266
Māori grammar texts consulted 267
Bibliography 269

Index of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Particles in Māori....12

Figure 2 Types of verb in Māori....14

Table 1: Particles following the base in Bigg's scheme....20

Table 2 Harlow's post-posed particles....21

Table 3 Locative particles and emphatic particles *anō* and *hoki*....25

Table 4: Order amongst the post-head particles....33

Table 5: A paradigm for *ai*....62

Table 6: Relative clauses and experience verbs....68

Figure 3: The heads of *ai* relative clauses....76

Figure 4: Changes in the head of *ai* relative clauses over time....79

Figure 5 Fronted adverbials marked by *ai* in narratives....94

Table 7: Relative frequencies of purpose clauses over time....175

Table 8: TAMs and result clauses....206

Table 9: Verbal particles and *ai*....253

Figure 6: Distribution of *ai*....254

Figure 7 Changes in the frequency of uses of *ai*....255

Table 10: *Ai* in classical narratives....256

Table 11: *Ai* in modern narratives....257

List of Abbreviations

ACC	accusative
AP	adjectival phrase
cont	continually
Canga	nominalising suffix*
CLS	classifying particle
DET	determiner
diff	different
DIR	directional particle**
DO	direct object
DUPL	reduplicating segment
EMPH	emphatic
EQ	equative
excl	exclusive
FOC	focus
incl	inclusive
LOC	locative particle***
mod	modifier
N	noun
NOM	nominalising suffix
NEG	negator
NP	noun phrase
num	numeral particle
Obl	oblique
PASS	passive suffix
Periph	peripheral
PER	personal article
pl	plural
post	post-head
PP	prepositional phrase
pre	pre-head
Su	subject (grammatical)
TAM	tense/aspect/mood particle
TOP	topic
V	verb
VOC	vocative
VP	verb phrase

* Derives nouns.
Has the general shape : C + anga
where C = consonant

**Directional Particles:

mai	hither
atu	away
ake	up
iho	down

***Locative Particles:

nei	near1
nā	near2
rā	far