E Neho, ka nui toku aroha atu kia koe: some reflections on translating 19th century Maori letters to William Colenso.

One of the most interesting studies in history is culture contact. This is especially so when the cultures are as different as those of the British Empire at the height of its world dominance and confidence - and Maoridom, isolated for hundreds of years in one of the most remote parts of the earth, and, until very recently, without iron tools or a written language.

Hullo and thank you for coming to this seminar. My name is John Laurie and I am going to talk about translating a collection of 19th century Maori letters to the missionary, William Colenso.

Tena koutou, nga rangatira o te Wananga o Tamaki-makaurau. Ka mihi atu ahau ki a koutou i runga i te aroha o te Atua. Nau mai haere mai ki tenei wananga. He korero tenei mo nga wa o mua. No reira e tika ana kia mahara atu ano tataou ki a ratou kua wehe atu ki te po, tae noa ki a ratou ma, na ratou nga tuhituhinga e korero ana tatou i tenei ahiahi. Ka mau te wehi ki ta ratou kaha ki te whakamau i nga rakau o tauiwi, ki nga ahuatanga o te tuhituhi, ki te whakapono hoki o te Karaiti. Ko ratou - kua wheturangitia. Ma tatou e korero i nga korero o te ao tuatea.

He pera ano taku me ta Mohi i ki ai i roto i te Paipera Tapu – he ngoikore toku reo, he paremo toku arero. He ahakoa - ko te mea nui me mau rawa atu ki te pono. No reira, Tena koutou katoa.

I will start with some remarks about the background of the letters, then focus on the difficulties I have had in trying to make an accurate translation into idiomatic English. I will then move on to some comparisons between 19th century Maori and contemporary English.

The Mitchell Collection of Colenso Letters

There are 210 short letters in the collecton. Most are about 100 to 140 words long. The originals are held in the Mitchell Library in Sydney. Te Rau Kahikatea, the Maori division of St John's Theological College, Auckland, obtained photocopies of the letters - and funding for a project to transcribe and translate them. They want to put them on a website for theology and history students and people interested in the Maori language.

The chief value of the collection lies in the window it provides on the 1840s, on a world where two peoples, separated by tens of thousands of years in time and half a world in space, came face to face in daily life and found they could understand eachother and talk to eachother quite well. It illuminates the years which saw the irreversable adoption, by the overwhelming majority of the Maori population, of the Christian religion of the newcomers – a change which predated the effective imposition of European political hegemony, in Hawkes Bay as in other parts of New Zealand. The value of the collection is greatly augmented by the fact that the letters were written by Maoris and reflect Maori viewpoints. There is a vast amount of European writing from the culture contact period but relatively little Maori. However, compared to other peoples in similar situations a large amount of early Maori writing survives. Missionaries developed a consistent orthography for Maori very early in the contact period and many Maoris became fluent in the new medium.

There has been much interest in Maori understandings of Christian doctrines and the majority of these letters were written by enthusiastic converts. There are many references to such things as life after death, God's mercy, *****

Another aspect of broader interest is the grammar and lexicon of the 19th century Maori language – more generally, the structure and vocabulary of an oral language, only recently emerged from the stone-age, [e puta kau ana i te ao kohatu]. – and, more generally again, the relationship of language to socioeconomic developments in society.

Colenso was born in Cornwall in 1811. He was 23 in 1834, when the Church Missionary society paid him to come to New Zealand, to run a printing press in the Bay of Islands - which he did with great efficiency and ingenuity. He was present at the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 and his eyewitness account, published in 1890, is the main source for the events of that day.

In 1843 he married the daughter of another missionary, William Fairburn of Otahuhu. They had two children in quick succession, Frances (known in the Mitchell letters as Pani) and Ridley Latimer (known as Ratima or Rati). Between the two births he was ordained as a deacon and sent to Hawkes Bay to open up a new mission station.

He was now 34, a lone Pakeha family in a completely Maori district. His mission field included the whole Wairarapa, as far as Cape Palliser at the southernmost tip of the North Island.

The Mitchell Library letters cover the period from 1845 to 1854. They encompass the flowering of Colenso's mission in Hawkes Bay and the conversion of the majority of the Maori population. They also cover the tragedy of his dismissal, for a sexual liaison with his live-in household help, Ripeka Meretene. Ripeka gave birth to Colenso's son, Wiremu, in 1851 She had recently married (or been married to) a male member of Colenso's establishment. Both were still living in Colenso's household. Agonising months followed - with everyone attempting to maintain a façade of ignorance. This collapsed and there were more months of mutual recriminations, soul-searching and prayer. Bishop Selwyn visited and Elizabeth Fairburn's brother, John. The local population was agog and Colenso's public appearances an agony.

The children, Fanny and Latimer, were taken away first, by brother John. Elizabeth followed a year later, taking Ripeka's son with her. Colenso was dismissed from the mission and stripped of his deaconate.

The intimate details of these extraordinary events can only be guessed at. There are letters of sympathy from friends and members of the mission. Arapera Waipari laments that she will no longer be able to see the children she has grown to love. Colenso's own voluminous diary comes to an abrupt end. ***

Colenso stays on in Hawkes Bay and refuses to give up the mission homestead he has created from nothing - "a virtual recluse" according to the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* but supporting himself as a trader in pigs, clothing and blankets, according to the letters in this collection. ***There are tantalising glimpses of an involvement with Arapera Waipari. She writes ***. Colenso's letters are intercepted and circulated, but prove ambiguous.

Colonial government and Pakeha settlement arrived in Hawkes Bay in 1854. Colenso bought land and became a member of parliament in the Hawkes Bay Provincial Council until it was dissolved in 1876. He publishes extensively on botany and Maori culture in *the Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Society*. He is commissioned to produce a multivolume Maori-English dictionary but only gets to 'A'. Respectability and forgiveness come with age and he is readmitted to the Anglican clergy five years before his death, aged 88, in 1899.

The Maoris who wrote the letters have left fewer traces. They include the chiefs of Ngati Kahungunu and the relatively unknown. Karaitiana Takamoana who was elected to parliament by Eastern Maori in the 1860s writes about****. Noa Huke and Hori Niania, prominent in the Land Court in the 1860s write to

Colenso appointed teachers in each of the villages he visited. These include **** They write to ***.

The most fluent letters, and perhaps the most impassioned, come from a young women (17 years old in ***) called Arapera Waipari. She is the only correspondent who addresses Colenso as tama (or son). I Her brother Nopera, is another fluent writer.
This is one of his letters concerning his sister. **** [Letter 158[55-57] from 1854.]

There are several other letters in connection with this incident. It seems that Arapera had been telling people about a relationship with Colenso and that one of his letters to her had been intercepted. Arapera has to appear before some kind of committee to defend herself.

Further confusing the matter, Colenso's biographers, Bagnall and Petersen, refer to "the adultery hearing which caused Domett so much anxiety was described [in a letter Colenso wrote to his wife] with an attention to his self-righteous part in the proceedings, peculiarly inapposite in him. At the hearing on the 31st May many settlers and natives rode into Napier..". Domett was the newly appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands in Hawkes Bay. Was Colenso upset because Arapera had transferred her affections to another, younger man? I am still trying to get hold of a copy of this letter and any contemporary accounts of the Court case.

Adulteries and elopements surface in a number of letters. Attitudes are not dissimilar to the mixture of prurient interest and disapproval occasioned by such occurrences today. *** The degree of public involvement in what would today be considered private matters is a startling difference. Colenso's own diary records the occasion when a 17 year old Arapera Waipari is accused of adultery after her betrothal to a Christian teacher. Blood spots found in her bed are held to be proof. A large public meeting is called. Colenso addresses the gathering on the facts of menstruation - but fails convince them that the 17 year old is innocent. ***

Colenso attempted to defend long-term Maori interests in the face of Government purchases of huge blocks at Waipukurau and Ahuriri at peppercorn prices. The open land of the Hawkes Bay and Wairarapa was good sheep country and large runs were informally leased in defiance of the crown's right of pre-emption embodied in the Treaty of Waitangi. Many letters refer to leases and sales. Hori Niania and others are accused of secretly selling land in Wellington without consulting other owners. ****

A further theme relates to backsliding among the congregations – sections of the community going away into the bush to hold separate services and rituals. *** There are quarrels among his teachers over precedence and points of doctrine. ***

There are pathetic requests for medicine and deathbed tales of Christian fortitude and hopes of future bliss.*** These are the years when introduced infectious diseases halved the population in a couple of decades.

It is worth noting that the letters hardly ever refer to groups by hapu or iwi names. The normal epithet is “the Wairarapa people”, "the Waipukurau people", "the Ohariu people" – referring to regions and villages.

I will move on now to the practical side of translating the letters. The letters arrive as photocopies. My brief is to produce an exact transcription of the contents as they appear on the page and an accurate, and as far as possible idiomatic, translation into English.

[Original letter should still be on the OHP]

I first transcribe the letter exactly as written into the first column of a two column Word document - with each unit of meaning (as far as I can determine them at this stage) onto a separate line. The almost total absence of punctuation can make this quite difficult. Some of the more fluent writers use commas, sometimes rather too many of them - one letter incorporates a couple of question marks, there is a rare full stop (unless it’s just a drop of ink) and occasionally a rather surprising semi-colon. Capitals are mostly reserved for the Lord God (te Atua or te Ariki), sometimes for Colenso (transliterated as Te Koreneho or Neho in Maori) and other people.

The next stage is to do a fairly swift translation in the other column. I occasionally look up unfamiliar words in the Williams Dictionary and the Reed Dictionary of Modern Maori. There are very few words I haven’t already come across.

The main difficulty for me is trying to make sense of unfamiliar constructions. I have a fulltext online Maori Bible on my computer which is my first call in this regard. It is keyword searchable by word, phrase and proximity. Each verse incorporating the search term (word or phrase) is displayed in Biblical sequence with the English translation beside it. I have found it particularly useful for tracking down idiomatic phrases “he mea kia” is one that springs to mind. The Maori is essentially what was written down in the 19th century – which is very useful. The English, unfortunately, is that of the King James translation - full of archaic words and phrases and often more obscure than the Maori. There are occasional references to Biblical passages in the letters - usually paraphrased rather than word for word.

The translation of Christian doctrines into Maori presented many problems for the missionary translators and the complete Bible was not available in Maori until the 1860s. However, a Book of Common Prayer was completed in the 1830s and printed in tens of thousands and Colenso’s Maori converts would also have had access to the complete New Testament and the more well-known parts of the Old.

One problem the translators faced was whether to use existing Maori words with established meanings or transliterate English terms. They used both approaches. Bible becomes *Paipera*, covenant is *kawenata*, glory is *kororia*, miracle is *merekara*, temple, *temepara,* repentance *ripeneta*, and devil, *rewera*. Existing Maori terms were also used spirit becomes *wairua*, redeemer is *kaihoko*, resurrection is *aranga* and prayer is *inoi* and holy, *tapu.* [The Williams dictionary states almost disapprovingly that the use of *inoi* for religious exercises is entirely modern.] The grace of God is *te aroha noa o te Atua*.. Forgiveness of sins is *te murunga hara* or *te murunga he* This was one part of the new religion which contrasted starkly with traditional Maori notions of what was *tika* or right, and seems to have been an appealing doctrine in the wake of the internecine tribal wars of the 1820s and 30s when the whole population of the East Coast had to seek had to shelter at Mahia, under the protection of the Nga Puhi chief Te Wera, for many years.

The names of the legion of characters in the Bible, minor and major, were also transliterated into Maori. This is the origin of many of the most common Maori personal names of today. The new convert would be baptised with an

English Christian name and retain his Maori name as a surname. The Ngati Whatua chief who sold the 3000 acres of central Auckland is known as Apihai Te Kawau. Te Kawau (the shag) was his Maori name. Apihai is Abishai, one of King David's captains in the story of David and Absalom.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century not having a Christian name was often a sign of adherence to the Pai Marire faith or traditional Maori beliefs. Such people would refuse to swear on the Bible in the Native Land Court and have to be affirmed instead.

Colenso's correspondents include Hamuera (Samuel), Paora (Paul), Aperahama (Abraham), Hoera (Joel), Rota (Lot) and Hemi (James). Other Biblical names are Taituha (Titus), Tiopira (Theophilus), Karauria (Claudius) and Pirihira (Priscilla). Names of the Anglican martyrs, Cranmer *Karanama*, Ridley *Ritiri* and Latimer *Ratima* were also common as were those of contemporary church and government dignitaries. The Ngati Maru chief who built the meeting house in the Auckland Museum, (Wiropi Hotereni Taipari) took the name of one of Hobson's administrators, Willoughby Shortland.

To return to the mechanics of translation:

The next step is to print out the document in the two columns. I like to work with a piece of paper in front of me as I correct the rough translation and polish up the language of the English version. I enter corrections and emendations into the computer file and make a new printout. This printout is then the basis for further revisions. I find it useful to put the document away for a while and come back to it afresh.

The Williams Dictionary is the main dictionary I use. It is the only Maori-English dictionary with examples of usage. The first edition was published in 1843, the most recent, 7th edition, in 1971. It includes about 14,000 headwords deliberately restrictings itself to traditional words, rejecting English transliterations and admitting only reluctantly changes in the meaning of words since 1840. The entry for *rangatiratanga*, for instance, reads only "evidence of breeding or greatness".

The Williams dictionary is usefully combined with the 1994 English-Maori dictionary compiled by Hori Ngata and others, in an online computer file called *Te Reo Tupu*. This is available from the LEARN network in the University Library. I will show you some examples from *Te Reo Tupu* later.

Another useful resource for phrase and idiom is a corpus of nineteenth century Maori newspapers which have been scanned onto a web site at Waikato University. The full text of these newspapers is keyword searchable. Many 19th century Maori transliterations of English words have subsequently vanished from the language and this is a good place to find them. Sometimes it is possible to sound out the Maori and work out the English. Two words (from another project I was working on) which had me stumped for a long time were *pereki* and *hamupene* – *pereki* turned out to be brake (in the sense of shooting brake, a horse drawn vehicle) and *hamupene* I suddenly realised as I lay awake in the early hours one night was really *hamupeene* or champagne. Another translator came across an imaginative translation of the name of the Polish capital – Pakangakite - which joins together the Maori words for War and see (or saw).

I also use the name and word indexes to *Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna* (the 200 page collection of legends and myths published by Sir George Grey in the 1850s) and *Nga Moteatea*, an anthology of over 300 waiata with English translations, compiled by Sir Apirana Ngata.

<u>Problems in Translation</u>

[show examples of letters]
I have already mentioned legibility and punctuation. A further problem is tone and register.
For instance there are the various ways in which Colenso is addressed. They are liberally scattered throughout the letters (much more so than English idiom would allow) and include forms such as *e hoa* (literally o friend), to *e ta* (o sir perhaps), *e koro* (o older man), e tama (o son or o young man). There is a difficult decision between the literal and the idiomatic in these areas. Standard expressions of affection are similar. Should "ka nui toku toku aroha atu kia koe" be translated as "Great is my love for you" or "I send you my love".

I can only say that I have tried to steer a middle path - occasionally succumbing to the temptation of a "my dear fellow" or a "well, old chap." There is really no exact equivalent for these expressions.

A more subtle difficulty is the fact that the writer and Colenso have a shared knowledge about the subject matter which is inaccessible to the 20th century translator. They may even refer to things obliquely rather than express them openly for fear of the letter falling into other hands.

They know for instance whether the pigs have already been sent to Napier or whether they are about to be sent. One letter, from the 1850s, concerns a dispute over the condition of a herd of pigs driven from Waipukurau to Colenso's yards for sale. The common Maori tense and aspect marker *Ka* can refer to the past, present or future. The action is often only located in time by the inclusion of adverbial markers such as 'yesterday' or 'next week' at the beginning of the narrative. These may even be omitted if the writer thinks they are redundant.

Idiomatic Maori typically omits personal pronouns once the identity of the subject is established "the commonest method of making anaphoric reference in Maori" according to Bauer (p.627). These deletions continue across sentence boundaries and in a situation where there is no division of the text into sentences it is easy to lose track of just which actor is the subject of the verb.

Nor is there any punctuation to indicate whether speech is direct or indirect and this can lead to ambiguities in some case.

English generally requires a decision about tense. A number of tenses commonly used in English have no exact equivalent in Maori – the perfect, the pluperfect and the future perfect for instance. Idiomatic English often requires these tenses where Maori is content with a simple past or future or the ambiguous ka I have already mentioned.

Like the Greek of the Iliad and Odyssey, and the Hebrew of the Bible, 19th century Maori is essentially a language of parataxis rather than hypotaxis. This means it hasn't developed complex subordinate clause structures to link ideas in long sentences. It has been suggested that such a structure doesn't develop until many years after a written language appears. [Sampson, p.73-74]

Nineteenth century Maori has no grammatical equivalent for many of the nuances of mood which are expressed grammatically in English. Mood covers the areas of wish and intention, necessity and obligation, certainty, ability (physical and permission) and conditionality. English encompasses the following forms in the present and future tense alone: I want to go, I will want to go, I would like to go, I may want to go, I might want to go, I am going to go, I will go, I would go, I shall go, I should go, I ought to go, I had better go, I have to go, I will have to go, I need to go, I will need to go, I may need to go, I might need to go, I must go, I can go, I could go, I may go, I may be going, I might go, I might be going.

To focus on the area of necessity and obligation
Winifred Bauer's 700 page *Reed reference gramar of Maori* gives the best overview of this area. She lists only two particles used as grammatical markers in this area. These are *me* and *kia* . Both can be intensified by the addition of *tino – me tino* and *kia tino*. *Kia* and occasionally *me* are also used to express wish and intention (as well as various concepts of aspect which I won't get into here).

Bauer notes "*Me* is used for a wide range of degrees of obligation, from advice to legal requirements." "Maori does not use a mood marker for marking physical obligation or necessity." (p.136) "Maori does not distinguish physical obligation from physical fact." (p.137)

In the area of ability she notes. "There is no mood marker for the ability to do something. Very often where ability is expressed in English it is simply not expressed in Maori."

This accords well with the difficulties I have had in translating mood phrases.

There are also particular difficulties with vocabulary. Nineteenth century Maori employs a very restricted vocabulary in comparison to a world language like 20th century English. This can be seen in the repeated use of basic terms like *pai, kino, pouri, riri*, (good, bad, sad (or dark), angry), which written English, anyway, endeavours to avoid.

It is common for Maori words, especially those denoting abstractions such as emotions, to have a much greater semantic domain than English and the translator is often in the position of deciding which of several English words most closely expresses the intentions of the writer. Sometimes the English meaning attributable to a phrase is entirely dependent on the context. I will illustrate what I am saying with some examples from the Te Reo Tupu dictionary.

[See overheads from Te Reo Tupu]]
sarcastic, aroha

John Patterson in Maori concepts in Pakeha English. in *English language in Aotearoa*. 8:19-24 discusses a number common Maori words (including mana, toa, utu) which cover a wide range of meanings in English wihout considering the reasons why this is so. This is a table which attempts to rank various works by the size of their vocabularies. Obviously such a comparison is problematic even for texts in the same language but I think the attempt is still worth making.

[Table of Lexical richness of selected texts]
It is important to remember that the relationship between the total number of words in a text and the vocabulary employed, although close, is not a linear relationship. Proper comparisons, without further mathematical analysis, can only be made between texts of approximately the same length.

I have included figures for two substantial nineteenth century Maori texts for which such figures are available*. Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna* is a collection of history, legends and myths compiled by Sir George from manuscripts by Maori authors, notably Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikaheke, and first published in 1855. *Nga Moteatea* is a collection of 300 waiata compiled by Sir Apirana Ngata and published in the twentieth century.

English has certain inflexions which are unknown in Maori and these must be taken into account as far as possible if a valid comparison is to be attempted. For instance English usually creates plurals by adding the morpheme ‘s’ to the singular form whereas Maori changes the definite article from ‘te’ to ‘nga’. (The indefinite article ‘he’ is not changed so singular and plural forms are the same. However, this is not as common.)

For the English texts I have adjusted the count by subtracting plural nouns ending in 's', possessive nouns ending in ‘s’, third person singular verbs ending in ‘s’, past tense verb forms ending in ‘-ed’, and the present continuous verb form ending in ‘-ing’ .

I went through the vocabulary for *Wuthering Heights* listed on the *Concordances of great books* website for the letters D, H and T, a total of about 1459 words. Counting only instances where the stem form of the noun or verb was also listed, I found 81 instances of plural nouns ending in ‘-s’, 30 instances of possessives ending in ‘-s’, 42 instances of a third person singular verb ending in ‘-s’, 147 instances of a verb ending in ‘-ing’ and 123 instances of a verb ending in ‘-ed’. In some cases it was difficult to assign a word to a particular category. This produced a total of 423 out of 1459 words where English inflexions are not matched in Maori. I used this ratio (approximately 0.29) to remove words from the adjusted counts for English language texts.

Maori adds a series of morphemes ‘-a’, ‘-ia’, ‘-ina’, ‘-ngia’, ‘-hia’, ‘-tia’ and ‘-kia’ to verbal stems to form passives which have no counterpart in English.

I went through *Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna* and found 282 passive forms of verbs which are not matched in English. I have removed these from the adjusted count for this book and the same proportion from the adjusted count for *Nga Moteatea*.

The different proportions of proper nouns in the Maori and English texts is another difficulty. The concordance for *Wuthering Heights* lists only 9 proper nouns (including possessives) under the letters D, H and T. This gives a ratio of 0.06 proper nouns or a total of about 60 different proper nouns in the whole book and about 40 in the first 80,000 words).

Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna includes a total of 888 proper nouns. I have removed 600 of these from the count for purposes of comparison. I have allowed a certain latitude to *Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna* here because of the argument that, denied the chance to enrich the language by borrowing foreign words, Maori elaborated on references to ancestral figures and places to a greater extent than English. I have unilaterally allowed the same number of proper nouns to *Nga Moteatea*.

Of course more accurate figures could be obtained for each of the books I have chosen and more allowances could be made for other features of the two languages.

My adjusted counts are given in the last column.

The best text for purposes of comparison is *Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna*. It is a collection of prose stories including myth, legend and history. The comparison with *Nga Moteatea* is more problematical. It is a collection of 300 waiata or songs. They often include a large number of names of ancestors and places. This is reflected in the large proportion of names and the 4000 words that appear only once.

Comparing *Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna* to *War of the Worlds* (although it is significantly shorter), *Confidence* (very similar in length) and the first 80,000 words of *Wuthering Heights* we find that the three English works have vocabularies that are 1.73, 1.435 and 2.02 times as big.

It is also interesting to note the tiny vocabulary of the Greek New Testament by the standards of more recent works and the larger vocabulary of the King James translations of the early 17th century. There are many definite differences between Greek and English which should, however, work in favour of a heavily inflected language like Greek.

A straight comparison of vocabularies may be criticised as too crude a measure of lexical and language complexity, even after the adjustments I have outlined above. However the data I have presented appear to fit with the anecdotal evidence. Until more careful work can be presented on a larger number of texts I believe my conclusions should stand.

I do not want to convey the impression that I think that 19th century Maori is wildly different from English in the areas I am discussing. The differences in practical terms are generally small. The important point is that they are overwhelmingly in the one direction.

Two well-known exceptions to the pattern of greater English language complexity should be noted – First, the distinctions Maori makes between dual and plural pronouns (*korua*, *koutou*; *raua*, *ratou*; and special inclusive and exclusive forms in first person dual and plural pronouns -*taua*, *maua*, (us two including the hearer and us two excluding the hearer), and *tatou* or *matou* for more than 2 people. Secondly there are the two categories of possession the a-category and the o-category.

I will digress here and mention the old cliche which says that because the Maori words for “before” and “after” in the time sense (*mua* and *muri*), also have the meanings “in front of” and “behind”, this means that Maori conceive of the past as being in front of them and Europeans conceive of the past as being behind them. English also uses “before” to mean “in front” and “after” (in the form aft) to mean behind in the spatial sense. The difference may be perhaps that English has acquired a second set of words which refer only to spatial relationships (and another set again to refer to time – “earlier” and “later”). Both languages, however, use the spatial metaphors long /roa and short/poto to refer to time.

I will now consider various explanations for the differences which I have found between 19th century Maori and modern English.

It is my impression that the science of Linguistics has generally avoided comparisons between different languages and is hostile to any notion of language evolution in the sense of development from a simpler to a more complex stage. Little attention is paid to the changes that a written language might bring about. It is easy to find statements of the following kind in introductions to historical linguistics.

> Lightfoot, David. The Development of language : acquisition, change and evolution. 1999. p.227
> "As far as we can tell languages have always been about as complex as they are today....we conclude that there never were any simple languages. Never."
>
> Crowley, Terry. An introduction to historical linguistics. 3rd. ed. 1997. p.277
> "....the level of complexity of languages is in no way related to the level of technological complexity of the culture of their speakers."
>
> Aitchison, Jean. Language: progress or decay? 2nd ed. 1991. p.216
> "we must conclude that 'the evolution of language as such has never been demonstrated, and the inherent equality of all languages must be maintained on present evidence'.

It is reluctantly allowed by mainstream linguistics that language must have developed from no language at some point in the human past, but this point is pushed back into a distant and unknowable era some 300,000 years ago

when Homo Sapiens first appeared. At this time there is supposed to have been a “sudden explosion” of language and thereafter languages are supposed to have gone through ultimately aimless cyclical movements in grammar and phonology– without any development in the sense of improvement.

There are, in my view, a number of reasons why such theories have become dominant in linguistics. Firstly, it was discovered that the languages of small stone-age communities were much more complex than 19th century theorizers had expected and were in every way comparable to the languages of technologically advanced societies. Secondly, linguistics has focused on the spoken language and the influences of writing on vocabulary and grammar have received little attention. Thirdly the structuralist theoretical basis of the majority of linguistic investigation has led to an overemphasis on grammar at the expense of vocabulary and semantic issues.

One of the main aims of anthropology and other social sciences since the beginning of the 20th century has been to combat a crude racism in Western societies about local tribal cultures. This has unfortunately tended to result in a dogmatic linguistic and cultural relativism. The awe evoked by the classical European languages in earlier generations of linguists has also militated against any notion of language development in the sense of improvement. Finally, the focus of historical linguistics, which might have been expected to take an interest in this area, has been on tracing historical relationships between languages and their speakers rather than growth of vocabulary or grammaticization.

The fallback position of mainstream linguistics is that every language represents an adaptation to a particular way of life and is equally relevant to the needs of the society that spoke it. The following quotations are an example of this sort of thinking.

> Lynch, John. Pacific languages : an introduction. 1998. p.249
> quoting Dixon, R.MW. *The languages of Australia*. 1980. "Australian languages tend to have quite simple numeral systems.. 'The one obvious gap in Australian vocabularies is the lack of any system of numbers. It is usually said that there are only numbers one, two , several and many...No special significance attaches to the absence of numeral systems in Australian languages; it is simply a reflection of the absence of any need for them in traditional culture.'"

> Samuels, M.L. Linguistic evolution : with special reference to English. 1972.
> “there is today no such thing as a primitive language; every language is of approximately equal *value for the purposes for which it has been evolved*…”

which is true as far as it goes, although one wonders about possible uses of three, four and five to the Aborigines and a logical extension of such an argument would be that the language of cows is of equal value for the purposes for which it has been evolved. All Australians are now quite happily counting numbers in the thousands and millions.

Studies of the development of individual languages such as English show huge increases in vocabulary within the last few hundred years alone. Old English dictionaries from the pre-Norman Conquest period iclude some 14,000 headwords (incidentally about the same number as in the Williams Maori dictionary), which rises to some 70,000 words by the beginning of the 20th century. The largest modern contemporary English dictionary is said to contain about 260,000 headwords. The growth in some abstract vocabulary of English is incontrovertible.

It is argued that the ordinary person uses the same number of words in conversation no matter which modern language they speak. for example and this is probably true.

> Lynch, John. Pacific languages : an introduction. 1998. p.239
> "The average speaker of a Pacific language also probably knows and uses between five and ten thousand words."

Of course today such languages are no longer isolated from eachother or from world languages. Many people also speak more than one language.

Nor is the average speaker the only valid measure of linguistic complexity. Modern societies are highly dependent on small groups of highly literate experts for their survival. An English professor of the 1950s, for instance, is said to gone through the dictionary and found he knew 35,000 words, nearly twice as many as any local language dictionary.

The crude racism of the 19th and early 20th centuries is now confined to the ignorant. An all-pervasive cultural relativity, cultural equality ideology predominates. This brings its own dangers. If degrees of civilisation are denied, if all historical languages and cultures are held to be equal, there is no explanation for the dominance of some over

others except in terms of oppression. To return to New Zealand and the labours of William Colenso, why did the Maori convert so quickly to Christianity, before the establishment of British hegemony and without coercion, even to the extent of taking on alien names for themselves? Why wasn't there a comparable process of conversion of the Pakeha to Maori beliefs?

The bigger threat may be that peoples with no long history of, and traditional culture appropriate to, life in large-scale communities may overestimate the value of their former cultures. A number of examples in Africa and the Pacific show the dangers inherent in ideologies of ethnicity and culture.

The evidence I have mustered is mostly anecdotal and insufficient for a rigorous standard of proof. I would call for further dispasssionate investigation of the links between language complexity and civilisation. I believe that the corpus of nineteenth century Maori provides us with an excellent tool for comparison. I believe it is time to acknowledge that the development of language has been a long incremental process, that it has been in the direction of greater precision, that it is still proceeding and indeed is gathering pace, and that it is an area of critical importance for a historically informed linguistics.

Thank you.

Bibliography

Aitchison, Jean. 1991. *Language: progress or decay?* 2nd ed.

Bagnall, A.G. and G.C. Petersen. 1948. *William Colenso : printer, missionary, botanist, explorer, politician : his life and journeys.*

Bates, E. and Goodman, J.C. 1997. On the inseparability of grammar and the lexicon: evidence from acquisition, aphasia and real-time processing. *Language and cognitive processes*. 12:5-6 507-584 October-December.

Bauer, Winifred. 1997. *The Reed reference grammar of Maori.*

[Bible] Online Bible [Fulltext database] [Rev. Phil Lindner, P.O. Box 21, Bronson MI 49028]

Bichakjian, Bernard H. 1988. *Evolution in language*.

Bybee, Joan, Revere Perkins and William Pagliuca. 1994. *The evolution of grammar: tense, aspect and modality in the languages of the world.*

Cannon, Garland. 1987. *Historical change and English word-formation*..

Colenso, William. 1890. *Authentic and genuine history of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi....*

Concordances of great books [Internet site] http://www.concordance.com 2/8/00 [Wuthering Heights]

Crowley, Terry. 1997. *An introduction to historical linguistics*. 3rd. ed..

Harlow, R.B. and A.H.F. Thornton. 1986. *A name and Word Index to Nga Moteatea*.

Harlow, Ray. 1990. *A Name and Word Index to Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna*

Romaine, Suzanne. 1992. The evolution of linguistic complexity in pidgin and creole languages. Hawkins, John A. and Murray Gell-Mann (eds.). *The evolution of human languages : proceedings of the workshop on the evolution of human languages, held August, 1989 in Santa Fe, New Mexico.*

Lightfoot, David. 1999. *The Development of language : acquisition, change and evolution*.

Lynch, John. 1998. *Pacific languages : an introduction*.

Patterson, John. Maori concepts in Pakeha English. *English language in Aotearoa*. 8:19-24.

Pruscha, Helmut. 1998. Statistical models for vocabulary and text length with an application to the NT Corpus. *Literary and Linguistics Computing* 13:4 195-198

Ryan, P.M. 1995. *The Reed dictionary of modern M¯aori*

Sampson, Geoffrey. 1997. *Educating Eve: the language instinct debate*.

Samuels, M.L. 1972. *Linguistic evolution : with special reference to English*.

Schoenemann, P.T. 1999. Syntax as an emergent characteristics of the evolution of semantic complexity. *Minds and machines* 9:3 309-346 August. [Abstract sighted on Web of Science only]

Schoenemann, P.T. and W.S.Y. Wang. 1996. Evolutionary principles and emergence of syntax. *Behavioral and brain sciences* 19:4 646-& December. [Abstract only]

Swadesh, Morris. 1972. *The origin and diversification of language*.

Tweedie, Fiona J. and R. Harald Baayen. 1998. How variable may a constant be? measures of lexical richness in perspective. *Computers and the Humanities* 32 323-352

Williams, Herbert W. 1971. *A dictionary of the Maori language*. 7th ed.