Te Whakapaipai, Dílárúchán: Towards Decolonisation via the Digital Self-Directed Study of Indigenous Languages

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Abstract
In this paper I reflect on the praxis of being a self-directed (Knowles, 1975) second language learner in two Indigenous languages—one as a settler (Māori) and one as a diasporic community member (Irish). Using action research methods (McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 1996; Greenwood and Levin, 2000) I examine my experience as a non-traditional student managing different modalities of self-regulated learning praxis. In learning Indigenous languages—where I live and where I am from—I endeavour to read the world differently by reading the decolonised word (Freire, 1970, 1985).

Key Words: decolonisation, language learning, self-regulated learning, action research, Aotearoa, Eire

Tēnā koutou katoa	*Greetings to you all*
Ko Slieve Aughty te māunga	*The mountain I affiliate to is Slieve Aughty*
Ko Lough Derg te roto	*The lake that I affiliate to is Lough Derg*
Ko Galway tōku iwi a ko Gibbons tōku hapū.	*My tribe is Galway and my clan is Gibbons*
Ko Tiernascragh te papa kainga.	*The village I affiliate to is Tiernascragh*
Ko Patrick rāua ko Patricia ōku mātua.	*My parents are Patrick and Patricia*
Ko John Patrick tōku ingoa.	*My name is John Patrick*

Introduction

Above is the translated English version of my *pepeha*, a form of ritual introduction in Aotearoa (New Zealand) Māori culture. Pepeha positions a person in relation to their connectedness to both family and place, including nearby waters (lake, river, or sea) and mountain. For some, this orientation towards place as much as people might seem unusual: as a member of the Irish diaspora, this was instantly logical to me. In fact, when I have shared my pepeha with an Irish audience I have never needed to explain the importance of connectedness to people and place. Mine is an adapted pepeha, however. As a feminist, I have chosen to position my pepeha in relation to my paternal grandmother rather than my paternal grandfather. I have interpreted tribal affiliation as her county in Ireland. Thus, there is a purposive and strategic mixing of the traditional, interpretive, personal and political in my pepeha.

Aotearoa is the most recent of a series of settler societies in which I have lived. I was born in the traditional territory of the Leni-Lenape (New York USA). I have spent a plurality of my adult life in the traditional territory of the Squamish (*Sḵwx̱wú7mesh*) and Musqueam (*xʷməθkʷəy̓əm*) in Senakw (Vancouver Canada). I now live in the rohe (territory) of Ngāti Whātua in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland). Since my time in Senakw I have endeavoured to align my teaching practice towards reconciliation with my Indigenous hosts. Much of this work has been framed around a decolonised (*te whakapaipai* in Māori) model (Smith, 1999).

Aotearoa is the first place I have lived where the Indigenous language is persistently reflected in mainstream and popular culture. We eat *kai* (food), spend time with *whānau* (family), and greet one another with *kia ora* (hello). The quotidian ubiquity of te reo Māori is deceptive, however: few non-Māori speak Māori at a conversational level. I aspire to do so.
Learning Māori is an obvious way for me to move beyond valuing decolonisation as a principle towards becoming a more active agent of decolonisation in Aotearoa. And yet…my focus on decolonization within the Aotearoa context revealed something else: a lack of consideration of my need to decolonise (*dílárúchán* in Irish) as a child of the Irish diaspora.

Literature Review

There is a limited range of literatures that looks at Indigenous language learning specifically as an

aspect of decolonisation. With regards to te reo Māori, Rātima and Papesch (2013) report on case study of one Māori woman's experiences becoming a fluent te reo Māori speaker as an adult. Te Huia (2015) examine the interplay between Māori identity, racism, colonisation and the efforts of Māori adult learner in learning the language. He reports both intrinsic (sense of confidence; improved self concept) and extrinsic (substantive access to participation in cultural and social spaces where te reo Māori is the quotidian language) benefits of learning Māori for Māori.

There is a somewhat broader literature that examines the Irish language learning as it relates to decolonisation. Dillon (2016) points out that "colonisation in Ireland and in many other countries has gone much deeper than political rule" (p. 100): he cites the hegemony of the English language in twenty-first century Ireland as one manifestation of this. Similarly, Murray (2005) argues that, while Ireland has disengaged politically from the United Kingdom, "there are many reasons to believe that much of what has resulted from centuries of domination lives on in our shared ideologies of progress and development today" (p. 18), including the predominance of English. The current status of the Irish language in Ireland is perhaps the most glaring example of this: in the most recent census, just under 40 per cent of the population of (the Republic of) Ireland were able to speak what is the official first language of the state (Census of Ireland, 2018), despite a schooling system with compulsory Irish language study at both primary and secondary school.

Cahill (2007) highlights several times in Irish history, where the Irish language was suppressed under British occupation, including the 1695 Act to Restrain Foreign Education, which banned schooling in Irish and led to the growth of illegal hedge schools "where Irish youth were taught in all subjects, including [Irish] and often Latin, Hebrew and Greek," and the advent of "national schools" in the 1830s, which forbid both the teaching and speaking of Irish at school (pp. 118-119). Cahill also points out that, despite the establishment of the Republic of Ireland, the use of Irish on the island of Ireland remains deeply contested. Schools teaching via the medium of Irish did not re-emerge in Northern Ireland until 1971. A 1949 Northern Ireland statute prohibited bilingual English/Irish street signs until the 1990s (p. 122). More recently the Democratic Unionist Party has blocked the establishment of an Irish language act in Northern Ireland. Thus, Irish the only Indigenous language of the UK without any statutory protections where it is spoken.

On decolonisation
Among postcolonial theorists, Edward Said has produced a body of work that looks at the colonial enterprise across the realms of politics, culture and social relations, arguing in *Orientalism* that "ideas, cultures and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied" (1979, p. 5). Said also wrote about the experience of exile and marginalisation as both actual and metaphoric experiences, since "the intellectual in exile derives from the social and political history of dislocation and migration" (Said, 2005b, p. 373). As a child of the Irish diaspora, this resonates with me—and my aspirations to learn te reo Māori and Irish. My Nana (grandmother) was a fluent Irish speaker, who did not give the language to any of her children.

Said has specifically written about Ireland and postcolonialism. He notes that "more than any other of its colonies, Britain's Ireland was subjected to innumerable metamorphoses through repeated settling projects and, in culmination, its virtual incorporation in 1801 through the Act of Union" (2005, p. 299). He goes on to say:

> It is an amazing thing that the problem of Irish liberation not only has continued longer than other comparable struggles but is so often not regarded as being an imperial or nationalist issue; instead it is comprehended as an aberration within the British dominions, yet the facts conclusively reveal otherwise. Since Spenser's 1596 tract on Ireland, a whole tradition of British and European thought has considered the Irish to be a separate and inferior race, usually unregenerately barbarian, often delinquent and primitive. (Said, 2005a, p. 310).

Similar arguments have been made about the Irish language--and Māori and their language. This is a common strategy of occupation and colonisation.

Thus, I have found much pleasure in beginning to learn these delinquent, barbaric and primitive

languages.

Method
This is an action research project, centred on my praxis as a self-directed additional language learner. According to McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996) action researchers "are intent on describing, interpreting and explaining events (enquiry) while they seek to change them (action) for In the context of this study events relate to (directed or self-regulated) learning activities, the action is to acquire language proficiency (however rudimentary), and the purpose was decolonisation. the better (purpose)" (p. 13).

Greenwood and Levin (2000) define action research as "research in which the validity and value of research results are tested through collaborative insider-professional researcher knowledge-generation and application processes in projects of social change that aim to increase fairness, wellness, and self-determination" (p. 94). For this study both definitions have currency. I am seeking to improve my practice as both a learner and university lecturer through a range of self-regulated learning strategies I often proffer to my students. I am also trying to foment social change: as a settler learning the Indigenous language where I live by learning my Indigenous language of where we are from.

As part of my studies—and as a part of this action research project—I keep an [online diary](#) "blog", where I capture a timeline of my activities and to chart my progress (McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 1996, pp. 87-88). As a sociologist my inclination is to use this blog as field notes—as I would during ethnographic research—though this diary process is less ritualised or systematic than a fieldwork diary: I write when inspired to do so, or to capture something that might be useful later. There are anecdotes, thoughts, reflections, meaning-making, and analyses of what I do and what I learn. These are written by me for me: as a result, I do not make great effort to unpack these for anyone else in the diary itself.

In addition to my blog, additional data sources include the learning materials themselves, particularly those that required me to interact with content via learning activities
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- Workbooks in each te Wānanga o Aotearoa *He Papa Reo* course kete (basket)
- Lessons and assessments in the Duolingo Irish curriculum
- Lessons and activities in a series of massive, open, online Irish language courses (MOOCs) offered by Dublin City University through the FutureLearn consortium
- Lessons and activities in *Gaelige gan stro* (Level One), a self-directed Irish language curriculum

Across these components I use self-reflection, dialogue and conversation, and narrative and story, in a cyclical way (McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 1996, pp. 21-22) to reflect on and in my learning experience.

My research question for this action research project is: to what extent do any (or all) self-regulated learning activities contribute to my learning of te reo Māori and Irish?

Diacrits and Dilemmas
Having previously learnt French as an adult, diacrits are something I am comfortable using rather than view French vowels as separate from diacrits I instead see multiple of versions of vowels when they include diacrits. Thus *e*, *é*, and *è* are each distinct vowels, rather than versions of *e* when I speak, read or write French.

Both Māori and Irish use diacrits to change the sound of vowels. Māori's macrons are relatively simple: a macron changes the vowel to a long sound; there are also a few vowel combinations to learn. In Irish the fada works similarly, but the vowel combinations in Irish orthography are much more complex. As a result, working with Māori language written materials has been more straightforward than those in Irish.

Despite being a language spoken by relatively few persons, there are many more Irish language learning tools available than Māori. In all other respects, learning Irish in a self-directed manner is more accessible. Trying to balance my efforts across both languages when one offers fewer avenues of study was my first dilemma.

Te reo Māori
The self-directed materials from Wānanga are comprehensive and well designed as a curriculum. However, the onus is on me to organise the various materials to structure my learning: the multimedia materials are on a memory stick; there is a workbook; and, an assessment book. These all sequence together, but I must manage the sequencing. Having an online course site that aggregated all these would make managing things easier and present a potential space for interacting with other learners. Instead at times my struggle with process rather than with language learning directly was another dilemma.

I enrolled in Wānanga as part of a cohort at my university. While there has been some organisation of social activities for our cohort, these are based at a different campus of our university and often other work-related responsibilities preclude my participation.

As Gaelige
Duolingo offers a range of languages via a platform that includes smart phone and tablet apps, as well as browser-based access. Several months after first using Duolingo to study Irish I discovered that the browser version offered both lessons and assessments, rather than assessments alone on my phone. Further, in paying to use DuolingoPlus I can work entirely at my own pace, rather than worry about accruing daily points to continue. Thus, on any day where I had five free minutes, I can complete a lesson. I can also elect to cover one topic through four levels or move through the entire curriculum staying at one level. This too has adapted well to my self-regulated learning.

Dublin City University's Future Learn suite of Irish language MOOCs are aligned with the Common European Framework for Languages: completing the first four courses (Irish101, 102, 103, 104) maps to level A1 on the framework…if one completes every learning activity. As this is not my first MOOC experience, I have engaged as a quasi-lurker, having completed nearly all assessments and consuming nearly all the materials, but not engaging consistently in the comment-based discussion opportunities in the courses. This ability to construct my participation based on my own inclination and requirements is well-suited to self-regulated learning. Persistently having found the orthography of Irish vexatious, however, remains intimidating.

Initially I also started working through the first of the *Gaelige gan stro (*O Donaill, 2011) book series. Alas, I quickly became time poor and put this aside: I intend to restart the book later this year. A dilemma here was my tendency to take on too many differentiated learning strategies concurrently.

When learning French, I found using multiple modes of self-regulated learning worked well for me—and it has for learning Irish too. I have struggled to find additional learning resources for Māori. As a result, I have dedicated more time to Irish. But social media have offered me additional modalities to support learning both these languages.

Social media
In addition to my own blog, I discovered many people using Irish in social media. I follow the *Motherfocloir* podcast, which is about "words, Irish, Irish words, and words from Ireland" (Ó Séaghdha, 2019). Ó' Séaghdha has also written two books about Irish (2017, 2018), which I have read. These resources given context to Irish more than contribute to language acquisition directly.

There is an associated Twitter account for *Motherfocloir*, which is curated each week by a range of guests. One of these curators subsequently created a DuolingoPlus classroom for followers of the podcast. As a result, we get homework to complete in addition to our own self-paced learning through the curriculum. This classroom also has a Facebook community, which fosters further interaction between learners as well. What began as listening to a podcast has resulted in a

substantive online community of practice in which I participate, albeit at times on a peripheral basis (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

The FutureLearn Irish MOOCs also have a social media presence. Students are encouraged to use a corresponding hashtag for each course (e.g. #FLIrish101). And there is an affiliated *Fáilte ar Líne* Facebook community. I have been a lurker in both.

I have also found following Māori language media on YouTube—including Māori Television, Te Reo Television, and TVNZ's *Te Karere* Māori language news bulletin—has supplemented the somewhat less prominent presence of te reo Māori on social media such as Twitter.

Conclusion
Greenwood and Levin (2000) argue that "action researchers do not make claims to context-free knowledge, nor are they interested in achieving such knowledge" (p. 96). This study, which is ongoing as I continue my journey as a te reo Māori and Irish learner, largely validates this stance. The greater options for Irish language study mean my time has been more focused on Irish over te reo Māori to a ratio of around three-to-one; ease of access also means I seem to be progressing more quickly *as Gaelige* (in Irish).

These endeavours are about acquiring Indigenous language in-context. However, the cumulative impact of more persons decolonising through learning Indigenous languages—whether the learners are Indigenous or not—is an outcome not constrained by any individual's particular context. We are learning to new ways to "read the world by reading the word" (Freire, 1985), in different languages and their accompanying epistemologies.

Murray cautions that "if we are only prepared to look at post-colonial theory along its linear and temporal axis, we will have missed the dual relationship, and co-existence, of the coloniser and the colonised 'other'" (Murray, 2005, p. 22). Thus, I try to be mindful of my positionality as a settler in Aotearoa. Ease of access alone cannot drive my opportunities to learn te reo Māori. I must seek out additional modalities for learning te reo Māori: ease of access is not a legitimate barrier.

I began this essay with my pepeha, in te reo Māori and English. Here it is again, this time *as Gaelige:*

Tēnā koutou katoa	*Go raibh maith agat go léir*
Ko Slieve Aughty te māunga	*Is é Eachtaí mo sliabh*
Ko Loch Deirgeirt te roto	*Is é Deirgeirt mo loch*
Ko Gaillimh tōku iwi a ko Mac Giobúin tōku hapū.	*Is é Gaillimh mo mhuintir agus is é Mac Giobúin mo theaghlach.*
Ko Tiernascragh te papa kainga.	*Is í Tiernascragh an tír dhúchais.*
Ko Pádraic rāua ko Pádraigín ōku mātua.	*Is iad Pádraic agus Pádraigín mo thuismitheoirí.*
Ko Seán Pádraic tōku ingoa.	*Is mise Seán Pádraic.*

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