Listening to Proper Nouns: Social Change and Maori Proper Noun Use in New Zealand English

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In the world of word classes, proper nouns are sometimes treated as though they are less worthy of attention than other words. The claim has been made, for instance, that because they begin with a capital letter and are therefore identifiable as the name of some thing, they carry a lesser semantic load than common nouns or, presumably, any word that begins with a lower case letter. Whatever the merits of this claim, it is also the case that any researcher interested in the interaction between language and society would be ill-advised to ignore the information that proper nouns can yield. This article aims to illustrate the importance of listening to the quiet voices of proper nouns.

In a study of the Maori word presence in New Zealand English over the period 1850-2000, proper nouns featured prominently. The study focussed on six indicator years (1850, 1880, 1910, 1940, 1970, 2000) and three principal sources (newspapers, parliamentary debates or *Hansard*, and *School Journals*), producing sixteen data files[1]. In each file, proper nouns were the dominant use of Maori words. In the newspapers, for example, proper nouns always accounted for more than 90 per cent of the Maori word presence. In *Hansard*, the Maori word presence was almost entirely composed of proper nouns for five of the six indicator years. The exception was 2000, when it fell to around 85%. In the *School Journals*, where the pattern was more variable, the year 2000 also saw the smallest contribution from proper nouns, a little over 60 per cent.

The study did not treat all proper nouns as one group, however, and divided them into three categories: Place Names, Person Names, and Other Proper Nouns, which included use of the type *Maori*, both nominally and adjectivally, as a distinct sub-category within it[2].

When the proper noun categories were examined in more detail, Place Names were the dominant contributor to the Maori word presence in each indicator year for the newspapers. In *Hansard*, however, the sub-category of *Maori* dominated from 1880-2000, whereas Person Names were the largest single category in each of the *School Journals* files. This information is shown in Figures 1-3.

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[1] The *School Journals* began publication in 1907, thus contributed four rather than six files to the corpus.

[2] While other ways of categorising both *Maori* and *Pakeha* are possible, in this analysis a word beginning with an initial capital was regarded as a proper noun.

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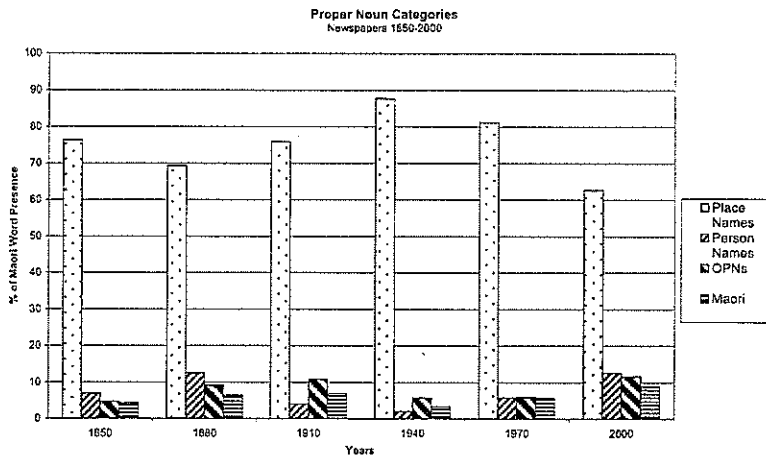*Figure 1: Proper Noun Categories, Newspapers 1850-2000*

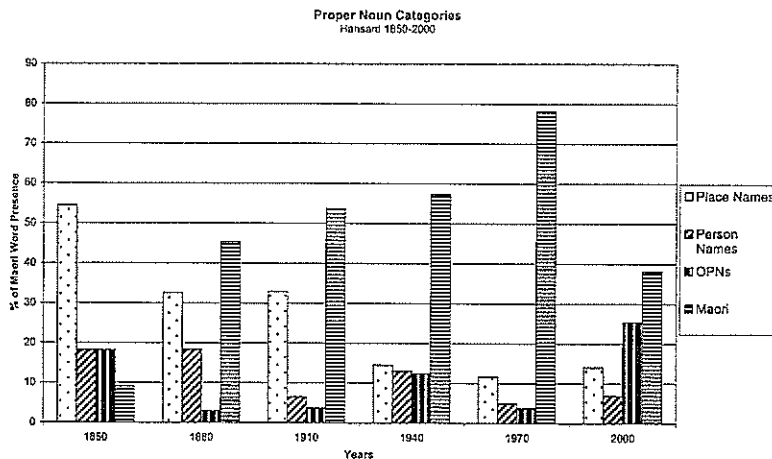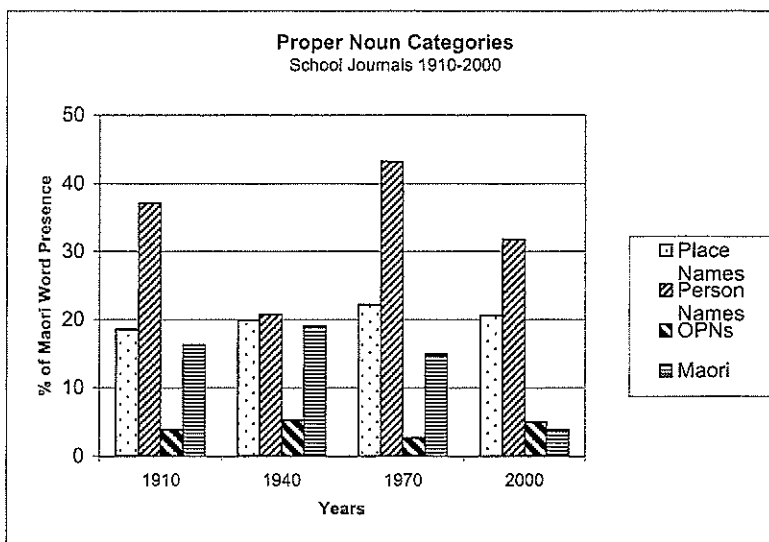*Figure 2: Proper Noun Categories, Hansard 1850-2000*

Figure 3: Proper Noun Categories, School Journals *1910-2000*

The different emphases in proper noun use in the three sources can be explained by the contents of the sources; the *School Journals,* for instance, mainly consist of imaginative and informative prose for young people, so the names of characters feature prominently. Similarly, changes in the presence of the different categories in any given year can also be broadly linked to known social change, the most obvious of which is the shift in the distribution of the Maori population. In 1945 this population was three-quarters rural-based; in 1975 it was three-quarters urban-dwelling (Dunstall, 1981: 403). The late Michael King (1985: 9) described the situation as follows:

> A generation ago, ... Maori and Pakeha lived largely separate lives in New Zealand. Most Maori were in rural communities, insulated socially and geographically from contact with non-Maori. Most Pakeha lived in towns and cities. There was little opportunity or necessity for newspapers to report on Maori affairs, except in the rare occasions when those affairs impinged on the lives of a largely Pakeha readership ...

Urbanisation brought Maori and non-Maori into closer contact than had been the case for over a century, and with it a greater awareness, for non-Maori at least, of the bi-cultural and bi-lingual nature of New Zealand society. Political changes in the 1990s brought more Maori into Parliament, thus giving Maori a greater voice in national debate. These changes all affected the Maori word presence in New Zealand English, and not the presence of proper nouns alone.

However, when the individual categories of proper nouns are examined, more detailed information about the changes that have taken place emerges. The question that the remainder of this paper considers is: what do the use of

and changes in the use of Maori proper nouns reveal about New Zealand over the period 1850-2000?

Place Names

Place names play a major role in the newspaper files. They include the names of districts/provinces, towns, settlements, farms/stations, streets, houses, geographical features (rivers, mountains, lakes, for example), oil wells and mines, sporting and recreational venues, as well as, on occasion, sports teams, horse racing events, and companies[3]. On one level they simply represent places that were in the news – Parihaka in 1880, Manapouri in 1970, for example – and determination of the actual types present was heavily influenced by the regions from which the newspapers were drawn[4]. Yet it would be an error to attribute no greater significance than this to the Place Name category. If nothing else, its domination of the Maori word presence in all six newspaper files tells us that this presence in New Zealand English is primarily geographical.

The Place Name category tells us much more, however. Place Names are not neutral. Since colonisation, Maori language place names have aroused surprisingly heart-felt comment. Henry Sewell, only days after arriving in the Canterbury settlement, confided to his journal (McIntyre, 1980, I: 126):

> Arranged to meet at Kaiapoi (the native name, would that all the names were native!)

On the other hand, almost sixty years later, a politician, speaking on the naming of railway stations in the House of Representatives, stated:

> I have ... a great respect for the old Maori traditions. But what is the use of using Maori names which only a few can pronounce. Take Otahuhu, for instance. That place would be better named 'Glover'.[5]

One factor that lead to the replacing of Maori by English names for places was the need to honour family, friends, and patrons. *Waitohi*, for example, was only found in the 1850 files; after that it was known as *Picton*[6]. A similar example is the replacement of *Kororareka* by *Russell*. By contrast, today naming and re-naming with Maori names appears to be the trend. In the *Hansard* 2000 file, for instance, *Tutae-ka-Wetoweto* was a newly-given name[7]. Elsewhere in the South Island in 2000, as part of Ngai Tahu's Treaty settlement with the Crown, bilingual road signs with Maori place names printed beneath the English name began appearing. Two years later, the Wellington Tenths Trust

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[3] The last three examples are also, and perhaps more often, found in Other Proper Nouns.

[4] Two of the four newspapers used were the *Otago Daily Times* and the *Wanganui Chronicle*. The types *Otago* and *Wanganui* were very frequent among the Maori words found in these two papers.

[5] *The Dominion*, 17 November 1910: 4

[6] Waitohi is a fairly common place name, however, being current for two other places and a number of geographical features (Reed, 2000). Picton is an interesting example of the fluidity of place names. It had six English names bestowed upon it before *Picton* was finally fixed upon in 1859 (op. cit.).

[7] 'So the National Government hammered out a deal ... to seal the protection of a block of virgin forest that we now are calling the Tutae-Ka-Wetoweto Forest.'

and Wellington City Council both encountered criticism after proposals to have more Maori place names in the city.

> Wadestown Residents Association president John Shrapnell was at first lost for words when told yesterday about the proposal that Wadestown be renamed Ahu Mairangi. 'I can't see many people wanting change. I would say that knowing how people hate change, that they wouldn't want a new name,' he said. (Johnson, 2002b)

A proposal in another part of the city was labelled 'an insult to the community' (Johnson, 2002a).

However, while the impulse to restore or to introduce Maori place names is clearly a by-product of political and social change, the resistance to re-naming should not be interpreted as an antipathy to Maori place names *per se*. As Tau (2000: 56) has pointed out with reference to Canterbury, not only were there 'attempts to maintain the earlier Maori names' but:

> Local traditions also evolved from the Canterbury farming communities that tried to explain Maori place-names. Rangitata was said to recall an incident when a young Maori Romeo called 'Rangi' waved 'ta ta' to his beloved. Nonoti, a place near Cheviot, reflected a story where a shearer (some said Premier Richard Seddon) uttered the words, 'No, not I.'

Clearly, then, place names have the power to arouse sometimes strong emotions. Other comments can also be made about their significance:

- they point to the fluidity of the orthography of Maori words in the early colonial period, with alternate spellings such as *Kai Warra/Kaiwarra* and unfamiliar renderings such as *Shoutorou* in the 1850 newspaper file. This fluidity reflects the fact that Maori was developing as a written language at the time, and had not yet been standardised[8]. Although Williams' *A Dictionary of the New-Zealand language* had been published in 1844, questions of sound representation had not been finally settled. In fact the *w/wh* debate would not be resolved until the first decade of the twentieth century (Parkinson 1995: 39).

- they also point, as in the *Kai Warra/Kaiwarra* example, to the adaptation of Maori loanwords to the borrowing language; the Maori place name was being integrated into the phonological rules of the borrowing language, which is the normal outcome for a borrowed word (Bynon 1977: 225). However, it should also be recorded that, since the 1980s in New Zealand, there has been a partial reversal of the phonological and morphological assimilation of Maori loanwords that linguists have traditionally expected.

- they provide evidence of dialectal differences in the Maori language, with southern examples being *Ikolaki* and *Waihola*; both are present in the 1850 files; indeed, *Waihola* persists through to 2000[9]

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[8] In Ferguson's terms of language development (1968) te reo Maori was passing from graphisation to standardisation, which would be followed by modernisation.

[9] Various sources support the view that 'l' was a feature of the southern dialect. For instance, Harlow (1994: 31) suggests that Williams' Paihia press edited out the 'l' from a booklet written for southern Maori, thus imposing the northern model. Begg and Begg (1979: 279) report on the shift from *Lakiula* to *Rakiula* to *Rakiura*, and comment: 'The sound of the southern dialect has disappeared not only through disuse but also because those educated in the Maori language, both oral and written, adopted, spoke and taught the northern tongue as

- on occasion, place name types are given rather than borrowed; examples are hybrids such as *Gleniti, Glentui*; their creation is a direct result of the influence of, and familiarity with, the Maori language

- furthermore, the Maori language component of such creations marks them as being distinctly, and uniquely, New Zealand.

Place names played a lesser role in *Hansard* and the *School Journals* than the newspapers. In *Hansard* they tended to be strongly influenced by electorate names. This difference is to be expected given the nature of the source. All the same, the place name types do to some extent reveal the concerns of the time – the prominence of *Parihaka* and related Taranaki place names in 1880, of *Pouakani* as a result of debate about a land claim settlement in 2000. The common thread is that land issues have been the fulcrum of the Maori/non-Maori relationship.

The Maori place names in the *School Journals* revealed a focus on New Zealand's post-contact history, although this received relatively little attention in the 1999-2000 file. Indeed, in that file the focus was not on contact/conflict between Maori and Pakeha, but on events that affected all equally – the Tangiwai rail disaster, the Tarawera eruption. The contexts in which Maori place names were found did not, in other words, emphasise difference between groups of people. The same shift was noted in an earlier study of Maori word use in the *School Journals* (Macalister 2000).

Person Names

The biggest change in the contribution of personal names to the Maori word presence in newspapers from 1850 to 2000 was the virtual disappearance of the names of chiefs/traditional leaders in favour of non-traditional leaders, particularly, but not exclusively, politicians. In 1850, for example, 67.5 per cent of the Maori personal names in the newspaper file were chiefs or traditional leaders. By 1910, this had fallen to 12.3 per cent and the names were those of historical rather than contemporary figures. 1910 was the last year in which this grouping had a real presence. Related to this was the appearance, from 1970, of a Maori urban professional grouping within the category, and, also from 1970, the explosion of Maori personal names in the Sports sub-category (accounting for 27 per cent in the 2000 newspaper file). Both of these changes are surely linked to the rural-urban shift in the Maori population, and the resulting, probably unprecedented, visibility accorded to Maori people in urban New Zealand.

The presence of Maori personal names in the newspaper files showed some variation (see Figure 1). Only in 1880 and 2000 did it exceed ten per cent, and on those two occasions Maori people – as far as this category is an indicator, remembering that not all Maori personal names signify a Maori person (e.g., Huia Onslow, a Governor's son), and that not all Maori people have Maori personal names (Dover Samuels, for instance) – achieved a prominence in the national consciousness that was unrivalled by the other four indicator years. In 1880 the consciousness was of a threat to colonial society – principally represented by the leaders of passive resistance at Parihaka, Te Whiti and Tuhi. It may be stretching credulity to claim that the

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the approved version'. However, the possibility remains that the 'l/r' distinction may result from Pakeha perceptions of a variably articulated 'r'.

same holds true for 2000, but it must also be acknowledged that John Tamihere, Tariana Turia and Merepeka Raukawa-Tait – the three most frequent types in that file – were often in the news as critics of the status quo, rather than its upholders.

The examination of Person Names also tells us about changes in the way in which Maori were regarded at different times. In 1850, for example, the Maori who were most likely to be identified by name were chiefs, and in particular chiefs who posed a threat to European settlement. Others were not treated with such respect, as the following examples make clear. In the first, the drowned man has no name; in the second Eopi appears to have the status of a chattel.

> DEATH BY DROWNING – On Sunday afternoon, about 3 o'clock, Mr William Burdett, ..., and a Maori, were unfortunately drowned ... [10]

> Mr M'Rae's Maori, Eopi, also accompanied us [11]

Sixty years later, Maori were still not being referred to in print in the same manner as non-Maori were. It is revealing of European attitudes at the time that when Taari Waitara, the son of the leader Te Whiti, was referred to, he was on six occasions referred to simply as *Taari*, his given name, rather than *Waitara* or *Mr. Waitara*. The same practice was observed at other times when a Maori person was referred to more than once. On the first mention the name was usually provided in full, but thereafter only the given name was used. The exception to this practice was references to public figures, such as Apirana Ngata, who would not be called, in his case, *Apirana*. Maori public figures, it seems, were accorded the same treatment as Europeans in newspaper reporting in 1910. Ordinary citizens were not.

Another point of interest is the way in which Maori words were used, presumably by non-Maori, as noms-de-plume from 1850 to 1970. This is an indication of familiarity with the borrowings, and a claim to 'ownership' of the borrowings; their use indicates that they had been 'naturalised' by English speakers. The majority of these noms-de-plume were sourced from the natural world, with, for example, *Kiwi, Kotare* and *Rata* all found in the 1940 newspaper file. Two of these, *Kiwi* and *Rata*, appeared on the children's page of a newspaper, but both *Kiwi* and *Kotare* also wrote letters to the editor. No obvious explanation for the choice of these particular noms-de-plume presents itself, other than the fact that the Maori words were familiar and attractive to the writers. On the other hand, choices such as *Tohunga* and *Taipo* in the 1910 newspaper file suggest the writers were creating a persona through the nom-de-plume selected. Similarly, the four letter writers in 1970 who incorporated *Kiwi* in their nom-de-plume were also making statements about themselves, as the semantic extension to 'New Zealander' had become well-established by this time.

The nature of the *Hansard* files determines the Maori personal names that featured in the data. Most were the names of politicians. In the *School Journals*, however, the Person Names category was more revealing. In the two earliest files a striking feature was the paucity of contemporary reference to Maori. Rather, Maori person names were found in historical contexts and in the

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[10] *Wellington Independent*, 15 June 1850

[11] *Wellington Independent*, 17 July 1850

retelling of legends and myths. Indeed, that latter function was common in all four files, to a greater or lesser extent. The most significant shift, however, has been in the appearance of Maori characters in contemporary imaginative prose. This was noted in the 1969-1970 file, with a series of stories about Piri, stories set in a happy, rural world. In the 1999-2000 file, on the other hand, Maori characters had to some extent moved into the urban, and the suburban, worlds.

Other Proper Nouns

A part of the importance of this category is the evidence it provides of semantic extension, or the extension of meaning of a loanword subsequent to its incorporation into the New Zealand English lexicon. The semantic extension of *kiwi* from its formal faunal sense to the variety of meanings it can carry today is an example of such a change (Macalister 2001), as is the figurative use of *waka* in the phrase *waka-jumping*. The corollary to this statement is that semantic extension is only possible because the extended words have become well-accepted into the New Zealand English lexicon. Indeed, the real significance of this practice is the suggestion that Maori lexical input is integral to a New Zealand identity. It was a practice that began early. Even in 1850 words of Maori origin were applied to uses outside their formal domain, with place and bird names being used as the names of ships. This usage was particularly evident from 1880-1970, when the application of Maori words to ships and race horses was the primary Maori word presence in this category. Many of the Maori words employed in this way appeared in hybrids, with horse names providing plentiful instances – for example, *Totara Belle, Wairere Lass* and *Kowhai King*. While the use of Maori names for ships and horses had dropped off in the year 2000 newspaper file, Maori words were still featuring largely as the names of sports teams. They also appeared to be increasingly used in a business or professional context, with new products such as the cheese *Hipi Iti*.

The use of Maori words in this way does not, however, necessarily indicate Maori involvement. The Other Proper Noun category also points to changes in society from 1850 to 2000, both technological (such as the appearance of aeroplane names in 1940, and the sharp reduction in ship names from 1910 to 1940) and as regards the changing position of Maori in New Zealand. In the newspaper files, for instance, iwi names were an important contributor to the category in 1850, declined in significance to 1910, and then virtually disappeared until 2000, when they became a major presence again. Similarly, in 2000, the frequency of *Waitangi* and also the appearance of Maori words in political/governmental domains suggested new areas of activity for Maori.

The Other Proper Noun category in *Hansard* shared features with that in the newspapers, including similarities in the presence of iwi names and evidence of Maori activity in government (e.g. *Te Puni Kokiri*). This reinforces the impression, drawn from the newspaper files, that issues of concern to Maori were being addressed in 2000. Land issues have been a constant theme in the *Hansard* files. Indications of other important issues of the time can be found in each of the indicator years. Some of these, such as the fate of Maori language newspapers (1880), were confined to one indicator year. But others recurred. The most enduring concern, on the lexical evidence in this category, surrounded the interpretation of the Treaty of Waitangi.

Another recurring type was *Pakeha*. In the nineteenth century this did not appear to have been a term that European New Zealanders used of themselves. In the 1880 *Hansard* file, for example, although the type *pakeha* was only used by European speakers, it was always used when speaking from a Maori perspective. Twice the speaker was imagining himself as a Maori character.

The use of Other Proper Nouns in the *School Journals* files was a little different from their use in the two other sources; there was, for example, no focus on politics and government. In these files the names of iwi and hapu were noted as a sub-category in three of the four, the exception being 1969-1970. In 1909-1910 and 1939-1940, tribal names were located in historical contexts; by contrast, the references in 1999-2000 tended to be more contemporary.

The collocations of the type *Maori* yield some insight into the relationship between Maoridom and non-Maori society. These can be summarised from the newspaper files as:

1850:   economic interdependence

1880:   Maori resistance to land loss

1910:   land issues the focus of attention

1940:   contribution to the war effort

1970:   involvement in politics and Maori interest groups making themselves heard

2000:   government/administration/organisations to the fore

In *Hansard* the collocations of *Maori* also point towards issues of concern in the Maori/non-Maori relationship, with the principal enduring focus being on land. On occasion however, notably in 1940 and 1970, social issues rose in prominence. This is no doubt related, in the first instant, to the reforming nature of the government as it dealt with the effects of the Depression, and, in the second, by the impact of demographic change. The youthfulness of the Maori population triggered collocations to do with young people and education. Naturally, the collocations of *Maori* also reflected the nature of the source, so that combinations such as *Maori Affairs, Maori member* and the use of the type in electorate names (from 1880 to 1970) and legislation titles are frequent.

In lexical terms, however, the real interest of this sub-category is the way in which *Maori* has competed with and eventually replaced *native* as a term of reference to the indigenous people and matters pertaining to them. The progress of this competition is clearly illustrated in Figure 4. The graph shows that by 1910 *Maori* had replaced *native* as the preferred referent, although this process was not fully achieved until 1970. Its retention until 1940 was a result of its persistence in official/government circles. The shift away from *native* in favour of *Maori* is also a feature of the *Hansard* data. This picture of synonym displacement is further reinforced in the *Journals* where *native* and *Maori* clearly co-existed in 1909-1910, but thereafter use of the former as a synonym was infrequent and restricted to historical accounts, such as Cook's voyages.

Figure 4: Types of Maori and Native, Newspapers 1850-1970[12]
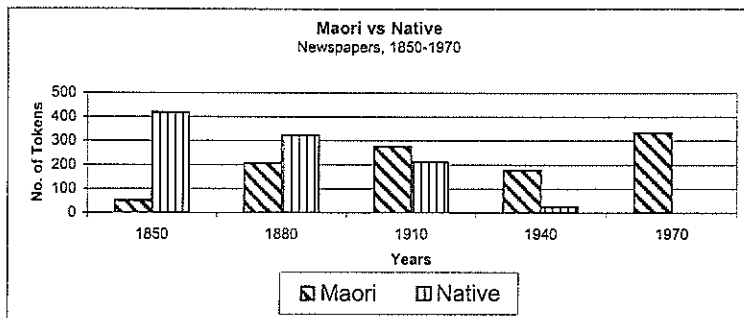
Unlike the newspapers, however, *Hansard* showed an overall decline in *Maori* as a proportion of the Maori word presence, with the fall happening over one generation, 1970-2000. This drop cannot be attributed solely to the changed names of the Maori electorates[13].

The decrease in the use of the type *Maori* was also one of the distinctive features of the *School Journals'* data. Furthermore, its use in this source paralleled the shift from historical to contemporary noted earlier. For instance, while collocations with *war, chief* and *tribe* were found in the earliest file, the main collocation in the most recent file was with English *mate*. Similarly, while *savage* and *brave* were the most frequent adjectives applied to *Maori* in 1909-1910, the emphasis in 1969-1970 had moved to *friendly*.

Conclusion

The Maori word presence in New Zealand English has changed in a number of ways from 1850 to 2000. The bulk of that presence is in proper noun categories, where there have been changes among the relative contribution of those categories. Place names, although still the dominating presence, are less dominant than they were and the other semantic domains play a greater role. The rise of the type *Maori* at the expense of *native* is noteworthy.

The changes that have taken place in the Maori proper noun presence in these files reflect developments and changes in New Zealand society. The demographic shift that occurred post-1945 has meant that Maori are no longer a largely rural-based people but have become, as with the rest of the population, predominantly urban, with an associated shift away from an emphasis on concerns about land to the needs of an urban-based people. All the same, the land and issues relating to the land remain a central focus of the Maori word presence.

The increasing visibility of Maori in public life and in daily life has contributed to a shift from an historical to a more contemporary focus, and

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[12] Information for 2000 is not included in this table, as the replacement of *native* by *Maori* was completed by 1970.

[13] Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western Maori received names drawn from Maoridom in 1996.

the use of proper nouns also tells us about changes within Maori society and changes in the relationship between Maori and non-Maori in New Zealand society.

Above all, however, this examination suggests that, from the earliest years of systematic colonisation, Maori lexical input has been and remains at the core of how we define ourselves as New Zealanders.

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