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TE REO PĀHO

Māori Radio and Language Revitalisation

A thesis presented for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

There is certainly a widely held belief among Māori working on the revitalisation of the Māori language that radio broadcasting has had a small, but significant, place for over half a century in bringing Māori language to both Māori and Pākehā audiences. Māori radio itself was established on the premise of Māori language and cultural transmission, maintenance and development. It was for this reason that many Māori organisations and individuals toiled towards Māori recognition within the radio arena. In 1988 Te Ūpoko o Te Ika, the first Māori radio station, went to air. With the restructuring of the broadcasting industry in the late 1980s and subsequent successful claims brought before the Waitangi Tribunal, provision was made for radio frequencies to be set aside by Māori, preferably with tribal endorsement. Since that time there has been a significant expansion in Māori radio. At present there are twenty-one Te Māngai Pāho-funded Māori radio stations broadcasting in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Yet after nearly twenty years of Māori radio, what has been the impact of the medium, and its contribution to Māori-language revitalisation? By using the five years of qualitative and quantitative research data collected by Te Reo Pāho on Māori radio, and combining this with further research contained within this study, this thesis will answer the above questions. Furthermore this thesis will examine the role of Māori radio within the larger context of Māori-language revitalisation, discussing the responsibility of Māori radio to te reo Māori.

To support the hypothesis, this thesis examines the history of radio in Aotearoa New Zealand including Māori radio, explores the Māori language from its origins to the present day, discusses the importance of Māori research and methodologies, presents the findings from the Te Reo Pāho project, examines the process followed by the Tūhoe tribe in working to establish their own Māori radio station, and studies similar radio experiences between Māori radio and Irish radio. Collectively these sections of the thesis combine to support the proposition that Māori radio is indeed having a positive impact on Māori-language revitalisation.

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*'E kore e ngawhere, he maire tū wao, mā te toki e tua'*¹

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¹ My translation: 'It will not give way easily, it is the forest-standing maire (New Zealand hard wood tree) which requires an axe to fell it.' A maire standing alone does not have the strength of one in the forest. Likewise a person with many supporters has more strength than one acting alone (Mead & Grove, 1989: 24).

To all those Māori people across Aotearoa New Zealand who completed survey forms, responded to telephone surveys and participated in focus-group discussions, I say thank you. Likewise, to all those individuals who worked on the project, collected surveys, organised focus groups and facilitated the project's movement around the country, I offer my sincere appreciation.

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