

Ethnic Consciousness and Government's Support Intervention: Maori language Revitalization and Education in New Zealand

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ABSTRACT: *One of major features of ethnic culture is language. Ethnic consciousness and language policies (government support) are two important factors to support the maintenance and revitalization of ethnic languages. It is critical to upgrade the official status of ethnic language and improve ethnic group's national consciousness of their languages. This paper addresses the importance of acquiring official language status and of improving the ethnic linguistic-consciousness for ethnic groups by analyzing what Maori people in New Zealand have done for their language revival, and concludes that the official status in itself can not guarantee the survival of an ethnic language. Rather, the survival of a language, along with the culture, lies not only in its official recognition but also in its use. To achieve language revival, not only should ethnic groups require legal supports from the government for official recognition of their languages, but use languages in social life as well.*

Keywords: *Ethnic consciousness; government's support; Maori language and culture revitalization; Maori language education*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ethnic consciousness and language policy are two important factors to support the maintenance and revitalization of ethnic languages. It is critical to upgrade the official status of ethnic language and improve ethnic group's national consciousness of their languages. In New Zealand, the European colonists' long-term objective was for assimilation of the native population and the consequence of assimilative policies was the near destruction of Maori language and culture. Facing the extinction of native language, and after a long and active struggle, Maori people fought for the right to obtain official status for their language. At the same time they built their own native language learning institution, a systematic mode of Maori language preservation and inheritance, including pre-school education (language nest), elementary, secondary, and University language training. What they have done to protect their native language proves to be a remarkable achievement, which encourages and provides a good example for other minorities in preserving and revitalize their language in theory and in practice.

II. EXTERNAL FACTORS: REQUIRING OFFICIAL STATUS FOR ETHNIC LANGUAGES FROM GOVERNMENT

2.1 Language rights

The ideology of language rights arose in response to the threat to ethnic languages in multi-ethnic countries or regions. The concept of language as a human rights or 'Linguistic Rights' was proposed by Miklos Kontra, Robert Philipson, and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. The language human rights they emphasized refers to minorities' right to use their native tongue.

In theory, all languages are equal, but in fact, dominant nations often ignore or reject the weak nation's language human rights. The fact that the minority's language lacks the same 'language rights' as the dominant language prevents it being popular in public places and getting any support from government, results in insufficient 'ethnolinguistic vitality', and finally, the disadvantaged groups have to abandon their mother tongue and turn to the dominant language.[1] If the weak nation's language rights cannot be guaranteed, or be recognized and supported, the language will be subject to extinction.

Crauss estimated that 90 percent of the languages in the world would be subjected to discrimination at the end of the 21st century. [2] Some minority groups can not identify with their mother tongues and about 6,000 languages are not the language of national education, of law, and of public affairs.[3] Under these circumstances, minority groups often must fight for language rights, that is, for the rights to use their mother tongue in social life, to making it legal and valid in order to maintain and develop their own language and culture.

2.2 The importance of gaining official status for ethnic languages

The status of official languages can help minority groups to improve the vitality of their language, thereby advancing their language preservation and development. Only by improving the legal status of endangered languages can the practice of language revival make progress. As the dominant language of a

country usually has official status under the law, it is not easy for a weak language to become a true official working language, not even within the confines of the minority cultural group. Official status in itself does not guarantee the survival of minority languages, but the status of official language can ensure much more support from government. These supports include language revitalization funds, the promotion of language education programs, and language service in public organizations.

III. INTERIOR FACTORS: IMPROVING ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS FOR LANGUAGE PROTECTION.

3.1 The importance of improving ethno-linguistic consciousness for language protection

Generally speaking, the future and destiny of the language depends on the attitude of the user group. Therefore, in the process of protecting language, one of the most critical and basic measures is to improve user's ethno-linguistic consciousness. Improving the ethno-linguistic consciousness of an ethnic group is to update the old concepts and establish deep national feelings for the ethnic language. With such deep feelings, any ethnic minority group can take the initiative to fight for the right of language, seek support from government and create the atmosphere for mother tongue maintenance by means of family education and community cultural activities.

3.2 How Maori people improve their ethnic awareness

From 1840 to 1974, under threat of European colonists, Maori people have had to accept assimilation education which led to the decline of the Maori language and culture. The New Zealand Government advertised the diversity of culture, but the initiative was controlled by mainstream society. The suppression of Maori language and culture, the imposition of cultural barriers, and racial discrimination has all combined to affect the education and the future of the Maori. It was not until the 1970's, the most critical period of Maori history, that the Maori became aware that their mother tongue was endangered and that it was not possible to rely on dominant society to preserve and develop the Maori language and culture. Rather, it was recognized that the Maori themselves had to revitalize their own language. They launched a large-scale language revival revolution, the essence of which is the practice of shifting Maori people's attitudes to improve their national linguistic consciousness. Loving their own nation and being so concerned with the survival of Maori language, knowledge, and culture, Maori people took matters into their own hands. They changed from being passive, negative, and confused into being active, positive, and directed. They set up their own independent education system including pre-school, elementary school, secondary school, and university. All of these were initiated by Maori and Maori organizations.

IV. MAORI LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AND EDUCATION

4.1 The background

English was the only official language in New Zealand from 1840 to 1974. During that time, the Government implemented the policy of assimilation and integration of Maori into the dominant culture by forbidding and suppressing the Maori language, knowledge, and culture. In 1881, the colonial authorities ordered that English be the only teaching language at schools. Maori language was prohibited, and all the school activities of Maori students were to be correlated with the model of the majority. Subsequently, only English was to be used in radio, television, and other media. In this way, surrounded by the dominant language, Maori students were not encouraged to speak Maori, and many denied that they could. After two centuries of colonial domination, and with the expansion of the English language, Maori language gradually declined. Dr. Benton, a Maori linguist, reported in 1971 the alarming news that Maori was in the last throes of language 'death'. [4] It was this news that finally moved Maori to such an extent that radical action was initiated. Maori communities across the country became united to defend their language and culture.

4.2 Struggling for official status of Maori language

Maori people took full advantage of effective legal protection and started an organized, large-scale campaign to struggle for official status for the Maori language. They proposed that the Treaty of Waitangi be the main legal basis for this stance, and Maori language be stressed as the important privilege for Maori people. They demanded the New Zealand Government implement the Treaty to guarantee the survival of the Maori language and culture. Due to the Maori people's long-term and unremitting efforts, and with community's support, the New Zealand government began to pay attention to the Treaty of Waitangi, and in 1974 the Maori language was officially included in elementary and secondary school's curriculum in New Zealand. Through the 1970's and the 1980's, some individuals or groups led by Dr. Benton worked to get official status for Maori language— at least to obtain an equal status to English.[5] Also, Benton suggested establishing a Maori Language Commission (MLC) responsible for the promotion of Maori language. Based on MLC, the Waitangi Tribunal made recommendations to the Government of New Zealand who enacted the Maori Language Act in 1987. This Act accomplishes three things: it declared the Maori language to be an official language of New Zealand; it conferred the rights to speak Maori upon any member of the Court, any party, witness, or counsel in

Courts of Law, Commissions of Inquiry and Tribunals; and establishing Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (Māori Language Commission) .

Obtaining status of official language for Maori language laid the foundation for the revival of the Maori language and culture. Subsequently, Maori people got supports from government for their language maintenance, such as policy, funding, and Maori language dissemination.

4.3 Building Maori people's language education system

The greatest contribution to the preservation of Maori language is the establishment of Maori language nests which initiated a series of activities involved by Maori to intervene in education and teaching previously controlled by non-Maori. The Maori soon built their own education system.

a. Pre-school education----Kohanga Reo (language nest).

In 1979~1980, "Aatarangi" and the earlier "Tu Tangata Whanau (Family Development)" laid the foundation for the establishment of the nest. The "Aatarangi project" trained the grandparents who could speak Maori language as teachers to pass down or teach their mother tongue to Maori children. According to the concept of the traditional extended family, "Tu Tangata Whanau (Family Development)" established community centers in the cities to recreate Maori philosophy patterns and cultural values in which Maori language plays an important role. Language nest also uses the method of "Whanau (Family)" to nurture the next generation. [6]

The first Language nest was established in 1982. Maori "Te Kohanga Reo", which can be literally translated as "language nest", was initiated to show the importance of language nest is the preservation and maintenance of Maori language. The campaign of Language nest is a nationwide education reform launched by Maori, which preserves an endangering language and makes it a popular language once again. The language nest provides a kind of atmosphere of Maori language and culture so that children can get a natural immersion. The typical language nest has about 20 children ranging from newborn babies to six year olds, and they can acquire their mother tongue and culture in a 'total immersion environment'. The language nests increases quickly. Four language nests were established in 1982, and by 1984 there were 287, and in 1988 there were 520 with more than 8,000 Maori students enrolled. [7]

The core principles of the language nest is to create a complete Maori language educational environment community to promote mother tongue education, and train the next generation of Maori speakers so that children can naturally acquire language, behavior norms, and traditional culture of Maori. Most of the staff or teachers who take care of children in language nests are parents or grandparents proficient in Maori language. The achievement of the language nest approach is demonstrated in that more and more Maori children can speak the Maori language and Maori people feel more confident with their ability to revive their own language and culture.

b. Total Maori Language Education: Maori Elementary School. In addition to language nest, Maori elementary school also contributes greatly to saving Maori language. Every year a large number of children graduated from language nests go to Maori elementary schools run by non Maori people, where there is no Maori language and cultural environment. In such a situation, these children might lose their Maori language acquired in the nest. In 1985, after the Maori people appealed to the Government for Maori elementary schools, the first Maori elementary school was established. It developed rapidly due to Maori people's efforts and the Government's support, initially with "six in 1990, developed to 43 in 1995 and to 59 in 1997". [8] Maori is the language of instruction in Maori National elementary schools, except for English courses, where the aim is to develop Maori students' bilingual competence to maintain and develop Maori language and philosophies. The principle of Maori elementary school is the same as that of the language nest, emphasizing autonomy, community, and parental involvement.

c. Expanding and Promoting Maori Language and Culture Education: Maori Secondary School. If the Maori language nests and national elementary schools are assumed to preserve the Maori language and culture, then the task of national secondary schools is to develop and promote Maori language and culture. In 1993 the first Maori National secondary school was established, with four being set up in 1997. [8] Both the Maori secondary schools and schools run by White people have common courses such as Maori, health and sports, math, science, and so on. The only difference is that the language of instruction in Maori secondary schools is the Maori language.

d. Training Maori Top Talents: Maori University. The first national university of Maori was established in 1993. Today there are three Maori Universities in New Zealand. The principle followed by the Maori Universities is "to maintain, promote, and strengthen Maori language and philosophies". [9] The students in National University are mainly Maori. Focusing on the practical application of Maori indigenous knowledge, the university uses the Maori language as the instructional language, carries out a number of Maori studies, such as research projects concerning language, culture, and community of Maori, and develops and designs various courses for Indigenous peoples' interests. The National University also develops

more Indigenous teachers and scholars with a sense of national pride and responsibility, while emphasizing the ability of Maori people, such as training Maori scholars for the academia and in leadership in the academic field. Most Indigenous scholars who are proficient in English deliver lectures, speeches, and write books. These are conducive to maintenance, dissemination, and development of Maori culture, knowledge, and philosophies.

V. Maori education model is independent of the majority education system but contributes most to the preservation and revival of Maori language and culture. Craham Hingangaroa Smith says that: "The Maori language nests (Te Kohanga Reo) set in motion a string of schooling and education interventions undertaken by Maori people. Then Maori elementary schools, Maori immersion secondary school options, and Maori national universities were established and developed in quick order".[4] Maori universities widely apply their research projects and courses to the language nests, Maori elementary schools and Maori secondary schools, and train more and more qualified Maori teachers for these schools as well. The system plays a key role for the preservation and revival of Maori language and culture.

VI. ENLIGHTENMENT FROM MAORI LANGUAGE REVIVAL MOVEMENT.

How the Maori people saved their mother tongue themselves becomes the most successful example of its kinds in the world. Reviewing the process of the Maori language revitalization, we find it is the ethnic linguistic consciousness that lays a foundation for the success of Maori language revitalization. China and other multinational countries can gain some useful inspirations from the Maori example.

5.1 Strengthening the Ethno-Linguistic consciousness and Changing the Mindset

Surrounded by strong language and culture, ethnic groups can advance within their own right. One of the major reasons for success of Maori language revival is Maori people's autonomy and initiative, or, a kind of national consciousness that shows a shift in the mindset of a large number of Maori people, a shift away from passively accepting the other people's language, and philosophies and doing things for themselves. It is necessary for minorities to cultivate a sense of pride in their mother tongue so that they can automatically, actively, and consciously shoulder the responsibility or obligation to save their language rather than solely rely on "organizations, associations, or foundations for language preservation".[10]

5.2 Preserving Minority Languages through the Implementation of Language Rights

Official language status cannot, by itself, ensure the preservation of a dying language. Saving a language successfully requires both the recognition of language rights and the implementation of administrative, judicial, political, policy initiatives and supports from the media. The Maori not only actively sought official language status, but also pressured the Government for further rights to promote and use Maori language in public service, administration, and official media. In China, the dominant position of minority's language in most ethnic areas has not been established in the administrative, judicial, and official media. For example, the administrative language used in government, judicial organizations, the people's congresses, and on television, and radio is mainly Mandarin, the common language in China. To some extent, this deprives the ethnic minority the right of having access to their mother tongue, and affects the preservation and dissemination of minority languages.

Minority citizens should have the right to get information in their native language with which they are most familiar. The family is the main space of minority language. But with the popularity of radio and television, the fact that Mandarin is the leading language in media denies the chance and space for minorities to have access to their mother tongue. This not only inhibits the acquisition and development of native languages, but also violates the minority's language rights. At present, the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language (2000) is the only law of common language in China, which only recognizes Mandarin and standard Chinese characters as the legal status of Common Language. Establishing the status and role of minority language in the local education system at all levels is of great importance for the survival and development of minority languages, and for the fundamental guarantee to implement the minority's language right.

5.3 Inheriting the Language in Family, Neighborhood, and Community

Indeed, neither the official status nor the school education can save a dying language. Can the language not be saved or be really alive only by habitual use in daily life, in the ethnic community, neighborhood and in the family, until speaking the language becomes a natural thing. Fishman holds that endangered languages can be saved; that the family, neighbors, and community is the base of inheriting the mother tongue and to nurture ethnic consciousness and deep feelings of the mother tongue starting from young children. [6]

5.4 Developing Ethnic Minority Bilingual Education

While the Maori language is promoted, the Maori people also learn and use English, which enriches cultures of both the Maori and non Maori people of New Zealand. With the acceleration of globalization, multiculturalism must become the inevitable trend of around the world, and it is by promoting bilingual education that a balance between the diversity and the integration in culture can be achieved. Ethnic language is the foundation in this kind of bilingual teaching. Bilingual education is one of the important measures for the

protection of endangered languages, and also the efficient means for ethnic minorities to adapt and thrive in a multi-cultural society while maintain their own cultural vitality.

In current bilingual education in China, some of the ethnic minority languages are being used only as auxiliary languages, acting as a tool of the media language to help students learn Chinese better instead of content in itself. That is, minority languages have been given a narrow range of functions in education. Therefore, China should vigorously encourage bilingual education in minority languages in ethnic minority regions to preserve and develop the national languages, while maintaining the understanding of Mandarin for ethnic minorities to be involved in the broader society. Such a policy would also enhance the majority Han people's general knowledge to better understand and respect the minority cultures.

5.5 Enhancing Ethnic Languages Teachers Staff Construction

The most important achievement in Maori language revival in New Zealand is the development of Maori language education, along with the training of a large number of Maori language teachers. How to build the team of qualified teachers is a common problem in minority education.

A major problem in China is that most of the teachers in ethnic minority schools lack the knowledge of minority cultures, and the overall quality of teachers is not high. The majority of teachers have a relatively weak understanding of minority cultures because the relevant content is rarely provided in general courses and pre-vocational and post-vocational education and training for teachers. Therefore, how to strengthen the qualifications of minority teachers and how to provide teachers with the knowledge of minority cultures should be stressed in current ethnic minority education. The key to the development and the foundation of improving national education is to build a professional and stable teacher base with a reasonable structure.

Note: This paper refers to Aboriginal or Indigenous people as ethnic or minority people, following common Chinese parlance.

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