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Language Contexts: Te Reo Māori o te Pae Tonga o te Kuki Airani also known as Southern Cook Islands Māori

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Language Name: Southern Cook Islands Māori

Language Family: East Polynesian, Polynesian, Oceanic, Austronesian

ISO 639-3 Code: rar

Glottolog Code: raro1241

Number of speakers: ~15,000 - 20,200¹

Location: 8-23S, 156-167W

Vitality rating: EGIDS between 7 (shifting) and 8a (moribund)

1. Introduction²

Te Reo Māori o te Pae Tonga o te Kuki Airani (Southern Cook Islands Māori) (henceforth Cook Islands Māori) is an endangered East Polynesian language spoken in the Cook Islands and amongst diaspora populations, predominantly in mainland³ New Zealand and in Australia. This name refers to the varieties originating from the islands of the Southern Group of the Cook Islands, namely the islands of Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Mangaia, 'Atiu, Ma'uuke, and Miti'aro. Cook Islands Māori has the ISO 639-3 designation rar and the Glottolog code raro1241. Both those organisations, as well as most linguists other than myself, have usually referred to Cook Islands Māori as *Rarotongan* (e.g. Ethnologue 2015; Glottolog 2016; Buse 1963c, 1963b, 1963a, 1960, 1965). This practice conflicts with that of community members, who use the name *Rarotongan* to specifically refer to the variety spoken in Rarotonga.

¹ In contrast with the New Zealand data, numbers of speakers are not known with certainty in the Cook Islands or in Australia.

² Thanks to Eliza Puna, Miriam Meyerhof, Tyler Petersen, Rolando Coto-Solano, Kevin Salisbury, and two anonymous reviewers for their detailed comments on this paper. All errors remain my own.

³ I use the term mainland New Zealand in this paper to refer to New Zealand proper or New Zealand excluding the realm countries of The Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau.

Non-Rarotongan Cook Islands Māori speakers can be offended by this conflation (e.g. Tongia 2003:103, Crocombe & Crocombe 2003b:108; Sallabank 2010:5). Therefore, the name “Rarotongan” should be only be used to refer to the Rarotongan variety and never to Cook Islands Māori as a whole.

This paper describes some key contextual features of Cook Islands Māori and its speakers. Section 2 introduces the dialects, genetic classification and names of Cook Islands Māori. This is followed by discussions of the history of the Cook Islands as a polity (§ 3), and the geography of the Cook Islands, (§ 4). Sections 5 and 6 address the vitality of Cook Islands Māori and describe its linguistic neighbourhood. Matters of literacy and literature in and about the Cook Islands are discussed in Section 7, while Section 8 touches on some aspects of material culture and non-material culture as they relate to language maintenance.

2. Dialects, classification and names

Both scholars and speakers generally take the view that there are four dialects of Cook Islands Māori: Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Mangaia, and Ngā Pū Toru for the group of islands comprising Atiu, Ma'uuke and Miti'aro. Community members who belong to the *Ngā Pū Toru* group acknowledge their shared variety while at the same time recognising differences between the specific varieties of each individual island. Glottolog has codes for the varieties of each island, shown in Table 1.

| Island of Origin | Glottolog |
|------------------|-----------|
| Rarotonga | Raro1242 |
| Aitutaki | Aitu1237 |
| Mangaia | Mang1042 |
| 'Atiu | Atiu1237 |
| Ma'uuke | Mauke1238 |
| Miti'aro | Miti1242 |

Table 1: Glottolog Codes

Differences between the varieties are largely lexical (see Table 2), but there are also some phonetic differences. Most prominent of these are that Mangaian has replaced /k/ with /ʔ~ʔ̥/ in most grammatical words and that the 'Atiu and Aitutaki varieties may be undergoing a change from /ʔ/ to /ʔ̥~Ø/ in all conditions. The 'Atiu variety is said to be more advanced in this change (Nicholas 2017: §1.6). Research is currently being conducted into the precise acoustic and phonological nature of these variations.

| English | Rarotonga | Mangaia | Aitutaki | Ngā Pu Toru |
|-------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| banana | <i>meika</i> | <i>kōkā</i> | <i>meika</i> | <i>mario</i> |
| talk | <i>tuatua</i> | <i>tara</i> | <i>autara</i> | <i>araara</i> |
| plenty | <i>ma'ata</i> | <i>ngao</i> | <i>atupaka</i> | <i>nui</i> |
| look | <i>'ākara</i> | <i>kākaro</i> | <i>'akatau</i> | <i>karo</i> |
| table | <i>kaingākai</i> | <i>keinga</i> | <i>auou</i> | <i>tepere</i> |
| no (yes/no) | <i>kāre</i> | <i>'ē'ī</i> | <i>kā'ore</i> | <i>'āita</i> |
| bathe | <i>pā'ī</i> | <i>takavai</i> | <i>umōme</i> | <i>mōme</i> |

Table 2 Lexical Variation

2.1 Genetic classification

The Polynesian language family is uncontroversially categorised as:

Austronesian > Nuclear Austronesian > Malayo-Polynesian > Central-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian > Eastern Malayo-Polynesian > Oceanic > Central Pacific > East Fijian-Polynesian.

The internal subgrouping of the Polynesian language family has received some scholarly attention using the comparative method, and on this matter, there are competing analyses (Pawley 1966; Marck 2000; Walworth 2014). The classification that all scholars currently agree for Cook Islands Māori is that it is a member of Central East Polynesian within East Polynesian. East Polynesian also includes Rapanui (the language of Easter Island), Hawaiian, Marquesan, Tahitian and New Zealand Māori. Central East Polynesian excludes Rapanui. Pawley (1966) and Marck (2000) both place Cook Islands Māori in a further subgroup of Central East Polynesian called Tahitic, along with New Zealand Māori and Tahitian. However, Walworth (2014) has posited that, due to ongoing historical language contact in central East Polynesia, the Tahitic subgroup is not reliably reconstructible. Under her analysis, which is used as the basis of the Glottolog family grouping (2016), Cook Islands Māori would be East Polynesian > Central East Polynesian > Mangaia-Old Rapa. All the remaining Central East Polynesian languages, including the Northern Cook Islands Māori varieties Rakahanga and Penrhyn, are directly under Central East Polynesian. So, the least controversial analysis would be that Cook Islands Māori is a Central East Polynesian language, closely related to but distinct from New Zealand Māori and Tahitian.

2.2 Language categorisation and names

The most common autonym for Cook Islands Māori is simply *Māori* or *Te Reo Māori* (the Māori language). These names are used by community members to refer to Cook Islands Māori as well as to the two other East Polynesian languages of the Cook Islands: Manihiki/Rakahanga (ISO rkh, Glottolog raka1237) and Mangarongaro (ISO pnh, Glottolog penr1237, aka Penrhynese or Tongareva). In New Zealand and internationally, these names are used to refer to New Zealand Māori (ISO 639-3 mri).

The name *Cook Islands Māori / Te Reo Māori Kuki Airani* is mostly commonly used to refer collectively to all the East Polynesian varieties of the Cook Islands. However, the Te Reo Māori Act (Government of the Cook Islands 2003) states that (Cook Islands) Māori:

Means the Maori language (including its various dialects) as spoken or written in any island of the Cook Islands; and is deemed to include Pukapukan as spoken or written in Pukapuka;

Pukapukan is included here as part of a policy not to exclude any language of the Cook Islands from the protections afforded by the law. However, this categorisation does not reflect the genetic classification, (Samoaic-Outlier according to Pawley 1966, or Nuclear Polynesian according to Marck 2000), or the prevalent views of the language community.

Various endonyms are used to refer to the East Polynesian varieties collectively. These include: *Te Reo Ipukarea* (the language of the homeland), *Te Reo Tupuna* (the ancestral language), *Te Reo 'Enuā* (language of the land) along with *Māori* or *Te Reo Māori* (the Māori language). There are also Cook Islands Māori names for the language that serve to disambiguate which “Māori” is being referred to. These include: *Reo Māori Kuki Airani* (Cook Islands Māori) and *Te Reo Māori o te Pae Tonga o te Kuki Airani* (Southern Cook Islands Māori). These names can be contrasted with *Te Reo Māori o te Pae Tokerau* (Northern Cook Islands Māori) and *Māori Aotearoa/Māori Niutireni* (New Zealand Māori).

When the regional varieties or dialects are being specified they are described using the pattern: *Reo [Island Name]*.

3. History

Before the arrival of Europeans in 1606, there was regular contact between the Cook Islands and French Polynesia, and there is obvious lexical borrowing from Tahitian in contemporary Cook Islands Māori, particularly in the Ngā Pū Toru varieties. In the last 200 years there has been significant contact and resultant borrowing from New Zealand Māori, particularly in the speech of Cook Islands Māori speakers who have lived in New Zealand for substantial periods.

There has been mass migration from the Cook Islands to mainland New Zealand since the Second World War (Walrond 2015) and since the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement in 1973, to Australia as well (Commonwealth of Australia 2017). As stated above, the majority of Cook Islands people live outside the Cook Islands.

People in the Cook Islands almost universally hold the view that it is desirable that people living in the diaspora return to the Cook Islands to bolster the population and the local economy. However, opportunities for sustainable employment are limited and this is the most significant factor that prevents most people from returning before retirement age. Many people return or wish to return when they are approaching retirement, but the New Zealand government has a policy that places barriers to receiving New Zealand pensions while living in the Cook Islands (New Zealand Ministry of Social Development 2017).

3.1 Political status of the Cook Islands

In the pre-colonial era before 1800, the group of islands that now make up the modern day Cook Islands was not politically unified, and each individual island (or small group of islands in the case of Ngā Pū Toru) was independent (Kloosterman 2007). However, after the arrival of Europeans in the region, this group of islands was gradually gathered into one polity administered from 1888 by the United Kingdom and then by New Zealand from 1901. Since 1965, the Cook Islands has been a self-governing nation in free association with New Zealand. Under this arrangement, the Cook Islands Government is responsible for all internal legislation, but New Zealand represents them at the United Nations, and is responsible for matters of defence. The Cook Islands are part of the Realm of New Zealand, and Cook Islanders are New Zealand citizens, which means they can move freely between mainland New Zealand and the Cook Islands. When resident in mainland New Zealand, they have all the rights of New Zealand citizens. When resident in the Cook Islands, they do not have access to all the rights of New Zealand citizens, such as access to social welfare or the right to vote in New Zealand elections. They do, however, have access to New Zealand public health services. New Zealanders who are not Cook Islanders, conversely, do not have the automatic right to live and work in the Cook Islands.

Economically, the Cook Islands is the most developed of the Pacific ‘Small Island Developing States’ (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017). The *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) plans to declare the Cook Islands a ‘developed nation’ at the end of 2018, making the Cook Islands the first country in the region after New Zealand and Australia to achieve this status. However, the OECD metric is entirely based on gross national income and as the Cook Islands has

a very small population this designation is problematic and there are concerns that the potential loss of eligibility for some types of foreign aid will have a deleterious impact on the wellbeing of the Cook Islands people, particularly those in the *pā 'enua* (Dateline Pacific 2017).

4. Location and population

The Cook Islands (Figure 1) are situated in the centre of Triangle Polynesia with Sāmoa and Tonga to the west, French Polynesia to the east, Aotearoa/New Zealand to the south, the Hawaiian archipelago to the north, and Rapanui at the eastern corner of the triangle (see Figure 2). The total land area of the Cook Islands is a mere 240 square kilometres but the economic exclusion zone is substantial at 1,800,000 square kilometres (see Figure 3). The northern islands of Pukapuka (10°53'S, 165°51' W), Rakahanga (10°02'S, 161°05'W), Manihiki (10°24'S, 161°00'W), Penrhyn (9°00'20"S, 157°58'10"W), and Palmerston (18°4'S, 163°10'W) are low-lying coral atolls. These are known collectively as the Northern Group. The Southern Group (see Figure 4) is geologically more diverse. Aitutaki (18°51'S, 159°47'W) is an atoll with a maximum elevation of 125m. The Islands of Ngā Pū Toru, 'Atiu (19° 59' S, 158° 7' W), Ma'uake (20° 9'S, 157° 20'W) and Miti'aro (19° 52' S, 157° 42' W), as well as the island of Mangaia (21°55'S, 157°57'W), are raised coral atolls or *makatea* islands. Rarotonga (21°14'S, 159°47'W) is volcanic and modestly mountainous. The highest point on Rarotonga is the peak of *Te Manga* (known in English as The Needle), which is 653 metres above sea level.

The 2011 census puts the resident population of the Cook Islands at 14,974, 88% of whom are ethnically Cook Islands Māori (Cook Islands Ministry of Finance and Economic Management 2012). However, the diaspora population in New Zealand is far larger. At the 2013 census, they numbered 61,839, making them the second largest Pasifika⁴ population in New Zealand. There is also a sizeable and growing population of Cook Islands people in Australia: 22,283 at the 2011 census (Pryke 2014).⁵ The total number of Cook Islanders is not reflective of the total number of speakers of Cook Islands Māori, or any indigenous language of the Cook Islands (cf. §2.1).

⁴ A term in New Zealand English that refers to peoples who have migrated to New Zealand from elsewhere in the Pacific, typically from Polynesia and Fiji.

⁵ Cook Islands people, whether born in the Cook Islands or New Zealand, hold New Zealand citizenship and as such have the right to live and work in Australia under the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement (Commonwealth of Australia 2017).

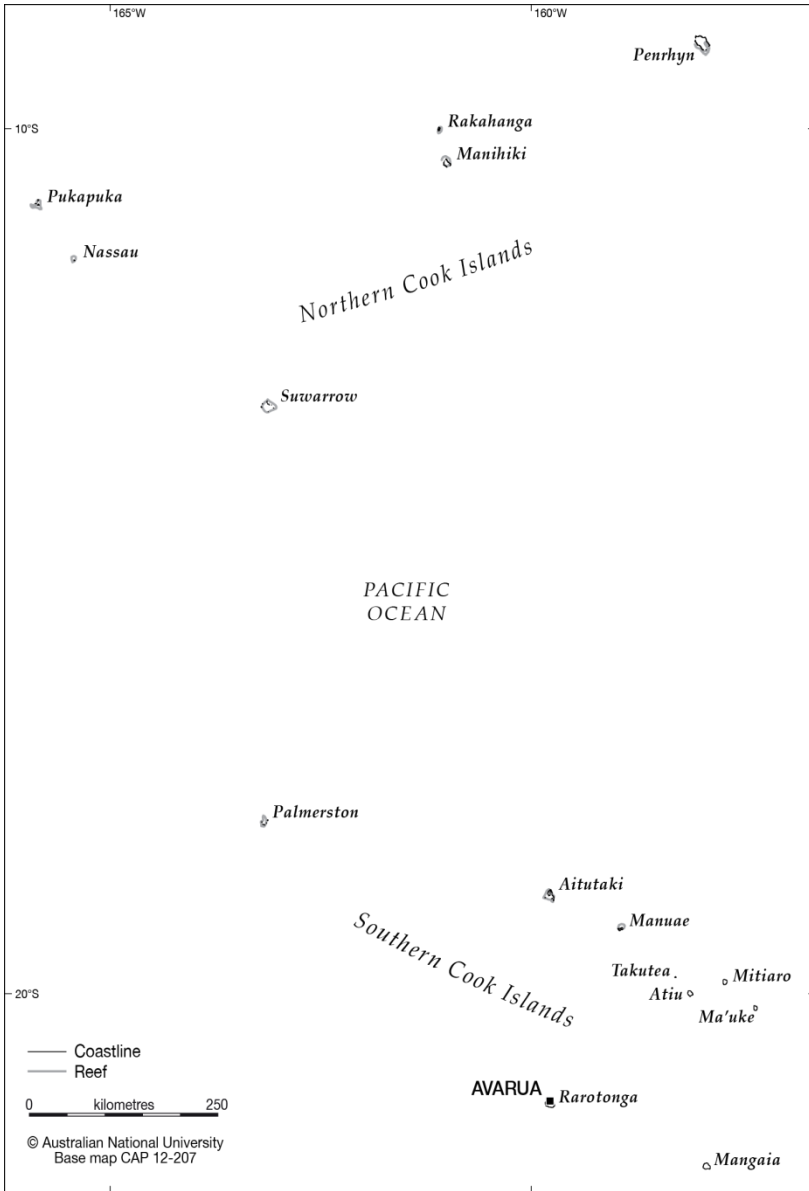


Figure 1: The Cook Islands (CartoGIS Services et al., 2017a)

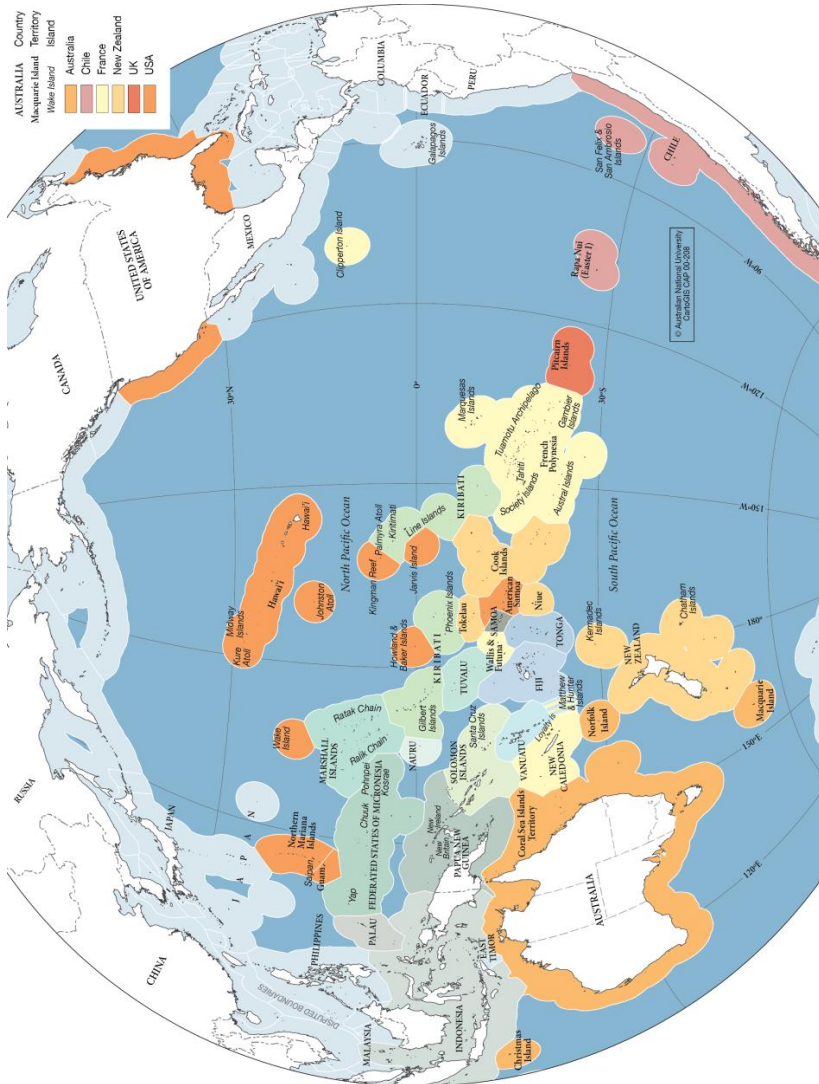
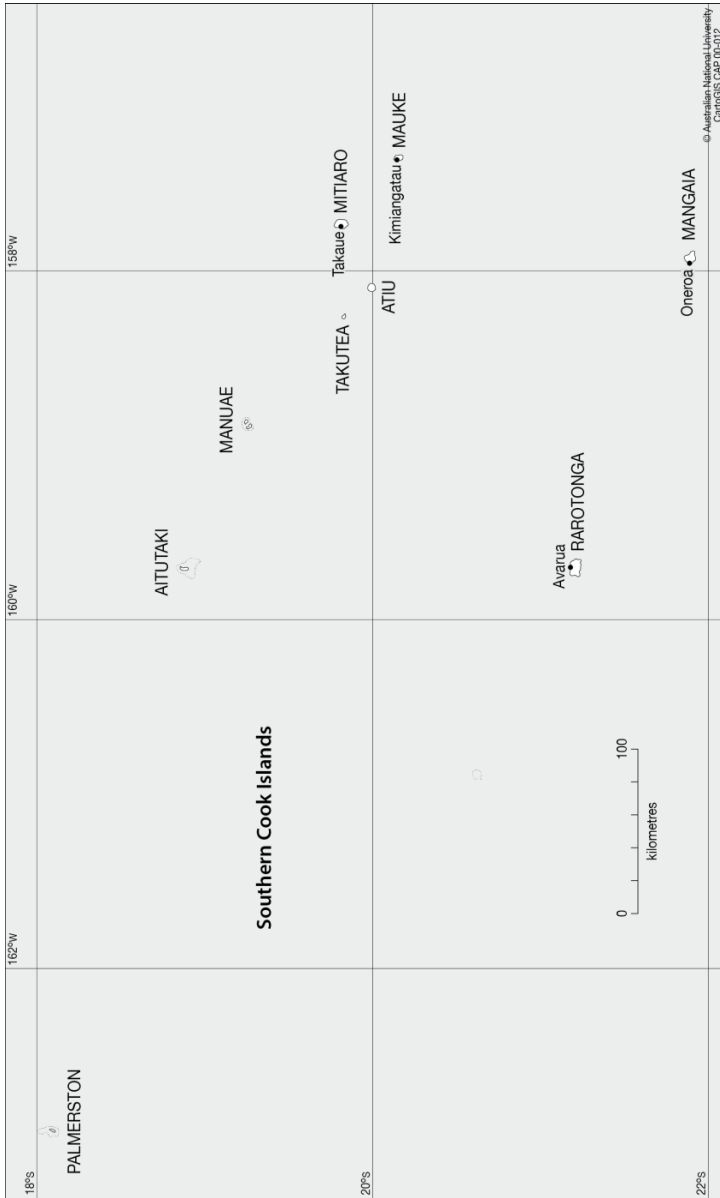


Figure 3: Pacific Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ's) Highlighting Former Colonising Powers and Independent Nations (CartoGIS Services et al., 2017b)



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Figure 4: The Southern Cook Islands (CartoGIS Services et al., 2017c)

5. Vitality status

There has not been any recent rigorous investigation into the vitality of Cook Islands Māori; such a study would be valuable. UNESCO categorises Cook Islands Māori as vulnerable, ‘most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home)’ (Moseley 2010) and Ethnologue characterises it as threatened (EGIDS 6b) (Ethnologue 2015). However, in my opinion, due to the very low rates of intergenerational transmission, Cook Islands Māori currently sits somewhere between a 7 (shifting) and an 8a (moribund) on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Lewis & Simons 2010:2).

The vitality of the language varies greatly depending on location. It is estimated that 90% of Cook Islands people live outside the Cook Islands. In mainland New Zealand, where the largest population of Cook Islanders reside, the 2013 census recorded that only 12.8% (7,725) could speak their heritage language. This includes Cook Islands Māori, as well as the Northern Group languages and Pukapukan. Most of these Cook Islands Māori speakers are older. Cook Islands people who are effectively monolingual in English make up 80% of those under 30, and 68% among those under 65 (Statistics New Zealand 2015). This is a marked decrease since the last major study of Pacific language vitality in New Zealand (Taumoefolau et al. 2002), but it was accurately predicted by intervening vitality studies (Davis & Starks 2005; McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery 2010).

Language shift towards English is also occurring in the Cook Islands itself (Balawa 1996; Herrman 2005; Davis & Starks 2005; Sallabank 2010; Biewer 2015). There are very few people in the Cook Islands who do not speak English and increasing numbers, especially younger people, are monolingual in English or are passive bilinguals. This pattern is particularly apparent in Rarotonga and Aitutaki (Sallabank 2010), which have the largest populations, but also have the largest numbers of (largely English-speaking) tourists, and are as a result the most westernised.

The more remote *pā 'enua*, as the other islands are collectively called, are the bastion of strong language maintenance. There, most people are fully competent bilinguals or multilingual, with a preference for Cook Islands Māori (in the Southern Group islands) in most contexts. However, their overall numbers are few. The 2011 census (Cook Islands Ministry of Finance 2016) puts the total population of the *pā 'enua*, (including those in Aitutaki who are showing shift towards English) at 3,290. This geographic factor was observed by Davis & Starks (2005) whose empirical study found that the more time a person spent in the *pā 'enua* the more likely they were to report high competency in Cook Islands Māori.

People residing in the Northern Group are likely to have the applicable local variety as their first language (L1), and to also be competent in Cook Islands Māori because of its dominance in writing and its use in church (cf.

§7.1). They are also likely to be familiar with English. People residing in the southern *pā 'enua* are likely to have Cook Islands Māori as L1 and to be competent in English. People in Rarotonga may have Cook Islands Māori as L1 but are increasingly likely to have English as L1 and to have less proficiency in Cook Islands Māori. This pattern is also apparent in Aitutaki. In New Zealand, as noted earlier, there is a small and rapidly decreasing number of L1 speakers of Cook Islands Māori and the vast majority of people are monolingual in English or have low proficiency in Cook Islands Māori. The situation in Australia, where there is a sizeable Cook Island population, is likely to be very similar to that in New Zealand but there is no comprehensive data available for the Australian population.

Table 3 summarises the regional variation in the vitality of Cook Islands Māori.⁶

| | Location | Status | Approximate population |
|-------------------|--|--|------------------------|
| Southern Pā 'enua | Mangaia, 'Atiu, Miti'aro, Ma'uke | Cook Islands Māori strong L1 | 1,400 |
| Northern Pā 'enua | Rakahanga, Manihiki, Pukapuka, Penrhyn | Cook Islands Māori strong L2 | 1,200 |
| Rarotonga | Rarotonga | Advanced shift to English | 14,000 |
| Aitutaki | Aitutaki | Shifting to English | 2,000 |
| Diaspora | New Zealand, Australia, elsewhere | Low speaker numbers, majority monolingual in English | 80,000+ |

Table 3. Language status by region

⁶ The population figures for the Cook Islands are reduced estimates based on those given in the 2011 census (Cook Islands Ministry of Finance 2016) and those for the diaspora are an estimate based on the official figures for the New Zealand (2015) and Australian (2014) censuses with some more added on for unknown population elsewhere in the world.

5.1 Official status

Cook Islands Māori⁷ is an official language of the Cook Islands, along with English. Cook Islands Māori has no official status or protection in New Zealand despite it technically being an indigenous language of the realm (see §3.1). It could be argued that as a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (United Nations 2008) the New Zealand government is not fulfilling its obligations to its indigenous people, especially in respect to Article 13, which relates to the right of indigenous peoples to revitalise their languages and to be supported in doing so by signatory governments (see McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery 2010 for further discussion of this issue).

5.2 Multilingual repertoire of speakers

Almost all Cook Islands Māori speakers have highly proficient to native speaker competency in English, both in the home and diaspora populations. Many older Cook Islands Māori speakers have good competency in New Zealand Māori because, until Cook Islands Māori became a part of the curriculum, most students at secondary school in the Cook Islands studied New Zealand Māori as a subject at secondary school. Most of these speakers then migrated to New Zealand where they continued to have exposure to New Zealand Māori. Many Cook Islands Māori speakers report some degree of competency above the level of mutual intelligibility in Tahitian, as well as some competency in various languages spoken in Suva, Fiji, where some Cook Islands people attend university.

5.3 Education

Western-style education was introduced to the Cook Islands by missionaries in the late nineteenth century. Schooling was initially conducted in Cook Islands Māori, but by the turn of the century there was an official preference for English as the language of instruction (Biewer 2015: 22). Throughout the 20th century the English language encroached further and further into the

⁷ Cook Islands Māori as it is broadly defined by the Te Reo Maori Act (Government of the Cook Islands 2003), which includes Pukapukan and the Northern East Polynesian varieties, in contrast to how it is defined in this paper.

education system under the racist assimilationist policies of New Zealand colonial rule (Benton 1981), and it continues to do so under that momentum in the present day. Today, a modified version of the New Zealand school curriculum is followed (Cook Islands Ministry of Education, Maraurau o te Pae Api'i 2017). The secondary school qualification framework is the same as New Zealand (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2017b). In terms of language use, the recommended practice is for Cook Islands Māori/the local variety to be used as the language of instruction up to year 6,⁸ with bilingual, but still Cook Islands Māori dominant, instruction for years 7-10, and then English dominant instruction in years 11-13. The practice in Rarotonga is that English is dominant at all levels with some, perhaps most, schools instructing entirely in English. In the *pā 'enua*, senior secondary school is available till year 13 in 'Atiu, year 12 in Aitutaki and Mangaia and to year 10 everywhere else, so for most students, if they are to complete secondary school they must move to Rarotonga, New Zealand, or even Australia.

The New Zealand curriculum includes Cook Islands Māori as a second language subject, and NCEA qualifications (the qualifications framework for senior secondary school) in Cook Islands Māori are available in levels 1-3 (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2017a). Most students who sit NCEA in Cook Islands Māori attend schools in the Cook Islands. Very few schools in New Zealand offer Cook Islands Māori as a subject as there is a shortage of suitably qualified teachers.

Formal early childhood education is available throughout the Cook Islands and the delivery language follows the same patterns as in the compulsory sector. In New Zealand there are early childhood providers known as *Pūnanga Reo* which are modelled after the New Zealand Māori *Kōhanga Reo* 'language nests'. Unlike *Kōhanga Reo*, most *Pūnanga Reo* are not usually total immersion in Cook Islands Māori. The New Zealand Māori medium educational model is potentially useful for the Cook Islands language community but the aforementioned lack of suitably qualified teachers makes the establishment of any such programme difficult, whether in New Zealand or in the Cook Islands. Additionally, the New Zealand Government from 2008 to 2017 had a policy that discouraged languages other than English or New Zealand Māori from being used as the language of instruction in schools (McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery 2010:92).

For adult learners, there is sporadic delivery of Cook Islands Māori as a subject at various New Zealand tertiary institutions and there are also community evening classes available in some cities. In 2017 the University of the South Pacific established a qualification called the *Diploma in vernacular*

⁸ The New Zealand school system starts at year 1 for students aged 5 or 6 and students complete secondary school in year 13 aged 17 or 18.

language (Cook Islands Māori) which is a linguistics-oriented programme aimed at native speakers of Cook Islands Māori. Adult learners of Cook Islands Māori do not currently have access to formal language acquisition educational opportunities in the Cook Islands.

5.4 Domains of use

In the contexts where Cook Islands Māori is the dominant language, that is, the southern *pā 'enua* and some pockets elsewhere, first language (L1) speakers use Cook Islands Māori in all domains, including online, where a small but vibrant language community can be found.

Religion has traditionally been a domain where Cook Islands Māori was dominant but this is changing. In Rarotonga, Cook Islands Māori is still the dominant language of the traditional churches, but English-speaking evangelical churches are growing. In New Zealand there are a handful of Cook Islands Māori language churches, but most churches attended by Cook Islands people are English-speaking. Furthermore, the New Zealand Cook Islands population is trending towards the overall New Zealand population with respect to religious affiliation where over 40% identify as having no religious affiliation (Statistics New Zealand 2014). So the church is not able to play the role in language maintenance that it does in other Pacific language communities in New Zealand (see Taumoefolau et al. 2002).

Print media and television in the Cook Islands are heavily English dominant.⁹ Crocombe & Crocombe (2003b:107) have said that radio is the medium with the highest use of Cook Islands Māori, but the voices heard are almost exclusively those of older people. This statement is still accurate. Traditional broadcast radio is important in the Cook Islands as internet access is not widely available, especially to older people and in the *pā 'enua*. In New Zealand, there are currently at least two regular Cook Islands Māori language programmes being broadcast and/or podcast (Radio New Zealand 2017; Radio 531 PI 2017). In Australia the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) cancelled their long running Cook Islands Māori podcast in November 2017 (SBS Radio 2017). The intended audience for this podcast was Cook Islands Māori speakers living in Australia. One area of the media that is seeing an increase in Cook Islands Māori material is user-generated internet content, particularly on YouTube (see Araaara Māori Kuki Airani (n.d.) for a selection).

⁹ In a delightful example of multilingualism, Korean and Philippine soaps are popular and are broadcast regularly on Cook Islands Television with English subtitles.

Formal welcoming ceremonies (*tūrou*) which occur for a wide range of occasions are almost always conducted in Cook Islands Māori, as are formal matters pertaining to the traditional leadership system, such as investiture ceremonies.

Overall, however, speakers (even L1 Cook Islands Māori speakers) outside the *pā 'enua* tend to have a strong English preference in most domains. In New Zealand and to a slightly lesser extent in Rarotonga I often have difficulty encouraging L1 Cook Islands Māori speakers to speak Cook Islands Māori for more than a short time.

5.5 Diglossia

There is diglossia in non-English dominant contexts, that is, in all the islands apart from Rarotonga, with Rarotongan being the more prestigious (H) variety and the local variety being low (L). Rarotongan has also functioned as H in the Northern Group islands. H domains include matters to do with the church and any published materials, including most written educational materials. There is some shift toward using local varieties in education but Rarotongan is still dominant in religious contexts in the *pā 'enua*.

To illustrate this pattern, at the church that my family attends in Ma'uke the minister is a Reo Ngā Pū Toru native speaker. All the Bible readings and his prepared sermon are delivered in Rarotongan, but all his conversational speech and exegeses are in the local Ngā Pū Toru variety.

5.6 Language attitudes

As is a tragically common story throughout the modern world, colonialism had, and continues to have, a brutal and violent impact on perceived status of, and the attitudes of Cook Islands people towards, Cook Islands Māori and the other Indigenous languages of the Cook Islands (Benton 1981; Balawa 1996; Siegal 1996). Perhaps the most harmful idea is the notion that Cook Islands Māori is inferior to English. This view was widespread throughout the 20th century and persists for many people today (Balawa 1996:141). However, there are a range of attitudes to the language within the contemporary community, and as the shift towards English is becoming more salient there is growing concern for the wellbeing of the language (Sallabank 2010). Cook Islanders, whether they are speakers or not, are likely to rank language as an important part of their identity (Taumoefolau et al. 2002). Older Cook Islanders often express disappointment that most younger people do not speak Cook Islands Māori, and there is a fairly widespread belief that it is the young people themselves who are responsible for the situation. Young people on the

other hand often express a strong interest in learning or improving their Cook Islands Māori but find that the older speakers discourage their efforts.

6. Linguistic neighbourhood

The languages most closely related to Cook Islands Māori are those of the so-called Tahitic subgroup of East Polynesian. These include the languages of Rakahanga/Manihiki and Penrhyn within the Cook Islands, and New Zealand Māori and Tahitian, along with the other ‘Tahitic’ languages of French Polynesia.

Pukapukan, a non-East Polynesian language, is spoken by members of the Pukapukan language community in Rarotonga.

English is the colonial language throughout most of the region and is the contemporary regional lingua franca. French-speaking French Polynesia, which constitutes the Cook Islands’ nearest neighbour to the east, is the exception to this English dominance.

7. Literacy, orthography and literature

As in other parts of Polynesia, Cook Islands Māori possessed an expansive and sophisticated oral literature at the time of first European contact. Since Europeans encountered Polynesia toward the end of their (traditional) imperialist endeavour, when the idea that all non-European peoples were barbarian savages was starting to wane, this literary prowess did not go as unnoticed as it had elsewhere. The traditional oral literature of the Polynesian people,¹⁰ including the peoples of the Cook Islands, was noted by missionary scholars for its sophistication and compared favourably to prestigious European oral literature (Biggs 1964; Thornton 1985, 2000).

Today, most Cook Islanders outside the *pā 'enua* have literacy in English at similar rates to those in most western contexts. Cook Islands Māori speakers are usually functionally literate in Cook Islands Māori but often have more proficient literacy in English, and read and write more in English than in Cook Islands Māori (Davis & Starks 2005). The most commonly consumed written literature is still liturgical material, especially the Bible itself, but there is a wide range of both historical and contemporary written literature in Cook Islands Māori (see §7.5).

¹⁰ There are many fine collections of traditional Polynesian literature, several of which are listed in Biggs (1964).

7.1 Orthography

The first Cook Islands Māori orthography was devised in the mid-19th century by missionaries from the London Missionary Society. Their orthography had several poor design features, however, it was usable by a population of native speakers and was taken up quickly (Benton 1981:98). It was largely successful, until the shift to English began accelerating in the 1980s. For the contemporary language community, the vast majority of whom are non-native speakers, the missionary orthography is a serious barrier to literacy and in turn to second language acquisition.

The most significant problem is that neither phonemic vowel length nor the glottal phoneme are marked. In a language with a very small phoneme inventory¹¹ this means that a high proportion of the phonemic data is absent.¹² Therefore, for learners, without a comprehensive internal lexicon, there is too much information missing for them to easily decode materials written in this orthography. Consider Example 1a, which is written in the missionary orthography. Given that the presence or absence of the glottal phoneme is not marked, it would probably be pronounced so that the translation given in 1b resulted. However, it is possible that the meaning (and pronunciation) in 1c was intended. A learner having to contend with the missionary orthography would potentially be unable to distinguish these sentences.

1a. *Koia te toe.*

1b. *Ko* *ia* *te* *toe.*
SPEC 3SG DET remaining
'S/He is the remainder.' (the one who is left over)

1c. *Ko* *ia* *te* *to?e.*
SPEC 3SG DET buttocks
'S/He is the buttocks.'

Te Bibilia Tapu Ra (The Bible Society, 1888) provides an even more potentially uncomfortable example. Luke 9.13 is written in such a way in the missionary orthography (2a) that an unsuspecting young person, delivering this reading in church, might produce the sentence in Example 2b, rather than the one that is intended, as shown in 2c.

¹¹ Cook islands Māori has 9 consonants (p, t, k, ʔ, m, n ŋ, v, r) and five vowels, with a phonemic length feature (i, i:, e, e:, a, a:, o o:, u, u:).

¹² In the Cook Islands Māori Revised New Testament (Bible Society of South Pacific, 2014) all phonemic glottal phonemes and long vowels are marked; 12% of consonants are the glottal phoneme and 14% of vowels are long.

2a. *E rima ua a tatou manga e rua oki ika.*

2b. *E rima ʔua ā tātou ma:ʔa e rua ʔoki ʔika.*
 TAM five merely DET.POSS 1PLINC food TAM two EMP vulva
 ‘We have but five loaves and two vulvas.’

2c. *E rima ʔua ā tātou ma:ʔa e rua ʔoki ika.*
 TAM five merely DET.POSS 1PLINC food TAM two EMP fish
 ‘We have but five loaves and two fishes.’

A non-fluent reader is particularly likely to insert a glottal stop before a vowel-initial word, with such a mistake likely to be embarrassing for all. In fact, the fear of mispronouncing a reading is an attested barrier to participation in this activity, and to reading out loud generally (Eliza Puna, personal communication, February 19 2018).

The Bible was translated using the Rarotongan dialect along with a smattering of words from other Polynesian varieties and many borrowings from English, Greek, and Hebrew. These borrowed items often use graphemes that do not represent sounds in Cook Islands Māori, and this further compromised the usability of this orthography. One significant negative side effect of the decision to use Rarotongan for the Bible translation was that via the prestige the Bible enjoyed after widespread conversion to Christianity, the Rarotongan variety became the standard and most prestigious variety of Cook Islands Māori. For about 100 years the other varieties of Cook Islands Māori and the Northern Group languages were almost never used in writing.

A further problem with the missionary orthography is its inconsistent word break and punctuation conventions. Diacritic symbols are sporadically used to mark vowel length and the glottal phoneme, as well as, confusingly, some other features. However, when the diacritics are used, their placement is inconsistent and frequently inaccurate.

Starting in the mid-20th century, linguists, language enthusiasts, and educators began to advocate for orthographic reform, as well as for the use of local varieties in writing. There have been a number of attempts at a revised and standardised orthography since that time, but these systems have not had widespread uptake and are used inconsistently. Today the need for orthographic reform is pressing because of the low numbers of fluent speakers. However, attempts at reform have been staunchly resisted by many sectors of the Cook Islands Māori language community largely due to two factors: general resistance to change, and the idea that it is improper to change the ‘language of the Bible’. In 2014 a revised translation of the New Testament (Bible Society of South Pacific 2014) was published which used a revised orthography that marks phonemic vowel length and the glottal phoneme, and is consistent with respect to word breaks and various other spelling conventions. It is hoped that the acceptability of this orthography might be encouraged by its use in this Bible.

7.2 Linguistic scholarship.

The most significant linguistic works to date on Cook Islands Māori are: *Ko te Karāma o te Reo Māori o te Pae Tonga o Te Kuki Airani: A Grammar of Southern Cook Islands Māori* (Nicholas 2017a), a detailed grammatical description, and the multimedia Paradisec archive, *Vairanga Tuatua* (Nicholas 2012). The first modern linguistic scholarship on Cook Islands Māori was that of Jasper Buse, who published a series of short works describing the internal structure of the phrase (Buse 1963c, 1963b, 1963a), some simple sentence types (Buse 1963a), some aspects of conjunction and negation (Buse 1963b), and the issue of word class (Buse 1965). Between Buse and Nicholas's work there were two masters theses written about aspects of Cook Islands Māori, Pearson's (1974) *Aitutakian a partial description based on case*, and more recently, Horton's (2000), *Determiners and complementizers in Cook Islands Maori*, which was written using the government and binding framework.

7.3 Dictionaries

There are two comprehensive bilingual dictionaries of Cook Islands Māori (Savage 1962; Buse et al. 1995) but as yet no monolingual dictionary. Buse (1995) and parts of Savage (1962) have been digitised and are now available in various online locations (Tism 2016; McCormack 2003; Te Ipukarea Society Auckland University of Technology et al. 2016). The *Ipukarea Society* from Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in collaboration with the University of the South Pacific, and the Cook Islands Ministry of Education have an ongoing project expanding the Cook Islands Māori Dictionary to include lexical material and audio visual examples from every variety of Northern and Southern Cook Islands Māori. This is an extremely valuable resource for the Cook Islands community and is well used (J. Moorfield, personal communication, 8th June 2017).

7.4 Pedagogical grammars

There have been a number of pedagogically-oriented grammars produced for Cook Islands Māori. These include: *Rarotonga (Cook Islands) Maori Grammar* by Tuaive Mose (1961), *Say it in Rarotongan* by Mana Strickland (1979), *Learning Rarotonga Maori* by Makiuti Tongia (1991), *Kai kōrero: A Cook Islands Maori language coursebook*, (Carpentier & Beaumont 1995) and *Te pepe Kuki Airani: A beginners guide to Cook Islands Māori* (Kingstone 2008). There is a need for a more comprehensive pedagogical grammars as well as general pedagogical resources to support the large numbers of adults wishing to learn the language.

7.5 Written literature in Cook Islands Māori

Cook Islands Māori has a substantial written literature for such a small language, dating back to the mid-19th century. Genres include traditional narratives and genealogies (e.g. Simiona 1979; Tanga et al. 1984; Kauta et al. 1993; Hutchin et al. 2006; Tara'are 2000), liturgical texts (e.g. The Bible Society 1888; Bible Society of South Pacific 2014), general fiction and poetry (e.g. Morgan 1986; Tongia & Kauraka 1991), children's fiction (e.g. Frienboe et al. 1958; Heather et al., n.d.; Rere 1967; Frisbie 1999), instructional texts and reference works (e.g. Rere 1976; Salesa et al. 2004; Underhill-Sem et al. 2013), newspapers, newsletters, and various government publications from both the Cook Islands (e.g. Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, Government of the Cook Islands 2014) and New Zealand governments (e.g. Polynesian Advisory Committee of the Vocational Training Council 1976; Ministry of Health 2013, 2015). In January 2018, the students of the *Diploma in vernacular language (Cook Islands Māori)* produced a sizable collection of comics (Toondoo 2018) and close-captioned animated cartoons (Araara Māori Kuki Airani 2018b) in Cook Islands Māori, and there is interest in using various types of new media to encourage language revitalisation. This corpus of written texts has the potential to be very valuable for the revitalisation of Cook Islands Māori.

8. Material and non-material culture

The contemporary material culture of most Cook Islands people is equivalent to the material culture of any urban Westerner simply because most Cook Islands people live in New Zealand or Australia. Even in the Cook Islands, especially in Rarotonga, the material culture largely resembles that of New Zealand. This colonial lingua-political context is of course the primary reason for the accelerating shift towards English. However, there are a number of distinctive practices still extant even in urban contexts, and there is a growing movement to revitalise many of these along with the associated language, most commonly *tīvaivai* (quilts), *raranga* (weaving), *'ei* (garlands), *pa'u* (drums), and *rākei* (costumes) for dance performances or traditional ritual. Crocombe & Crocombe's *Akono'anga Maori: Cook Islands culture* (2003a) is a good reference for many aspects of contemporary Cook Islands culture, both material and non-material. For a thorough treatment of the traditional material culture found in the Southern Cook Islands last century see Buck (1976) *The material culture of the Cook Islands (Aitutaki)*. Examples of community-led revitalisation activities pertaining to some of these aspects of traditional knowledge can be found on Araara Māori Kuki Airani (2018a).

In contrast to the generally delicate status of Cook Islands Māori, there is a thriving culture of using Cook Islands Māori as well as the other Cook Islands

varieties in music and performing arts, both traditional and contemporary. See Tehei Maeva (2013) for an example of a contemporary pop song which describes the steps for the cultivation and preparation of taro.

There are no formal register distinctions in Cook Islands Māori, unlike those found elsewhere in the region such as in Samoa or Tonga.

9. Conclusion

Like so many of the world's languages today, especially Indigenous languages in settler colonial contexts, Cook Islands Māori is under enormous pressure from the hegemony of the English language, both in the diaspora communities in New Zealand and Australia where most Cook Islands people live, and in the main population centres in the Cook Islands themselves. The New Zealand Government has both a constitutional and a moral responsibility to do more to support the language at an institutional level (McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery 2010). Cook Islands people are indigenous to the Realm of New Zealand as are the languages of the Cook Islands. The 65,000 Cook Islands people living in mainland New Zealand have a right to have their languages recognised and supported, particularly within the education system. Despite the current poor vitality of the language as a naturally transmitted spoken language, some comfort can be taken from how well documented Cook Islands Māori is both in terms of written texts of many genres and in a large corpus of spoken texts both in the *Vairanga Tuatua* (Nicholas 2012) and elsewhere online. Furthermore, growing awareness in the speech community regarding the increasingly endangered status of the language is leading to grass roots revitalisation efforts.

List of abbreviations

| | |
|--------|---------------------------------------|
| 1PLINC | First person plural inclusive pronoun |
| 3SG | Third person singular pronoun |
| DET | Determiner |
| EMP | Emphatic |
| POSS | Possessive |
| SPEC | Specifying preposition |
| TAM | Tense, Aspect, Mood |

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