
Analysis Of Errors Made By Learners Of Maori In An Introductory University Course

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In An Introductory University Course

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Abstract
This report presents a survey of the range of grammatical and lexical errors made in written Maori by University students taking an introductory course in Maori language. We begin by introducing and motivating an error classification of different classes of error. We then provide an analysis of three different types of student writing: homework assignments, impromptu tests and exam transcripts. We conclude with some remarks about the patterns of errors which we found.

Introduction
When teaching a foreign language, it is important to have in mind a model of the kinds of errors which students are likely to make at any point in their course. Without this knowledge, it is hard to decide how quickly to proceed from one topic to another, or which types of interaction to concentrate on in the classroom.

We have conducted an analysis of the kinds of written errors made by University students taking an introductory course in Maori language. We undertook this work firstly because we wanted to provide some quantitative information about the pattern of errors for the teachers involved in the course, and (with some caveats) for other teachers of introductory courses in Maori. Secondy, and more specifically, our study will play a role in the design and evaluation of two computer-aided language learning (CALL) systems which we are building to complement the course. We want to ensure that the systems are designed to target the errors which are most commonly made. Moreover, we would like to evaluate these systems by comparing errors made by students who have had experience with either system, with students from a control group that has had no exposure to either system. Our main purpose is to present some useful resources and information for teachers involved in introductory courses in Maori language.
Classification of errors

Our work is motivated by the need to consider the types of errors made by students learning te reo Maori. One reason for doing this is to understand how additional teaching support could be provided via provision of computer-aided tutorial systems. Another reason is to develop more sophisticated linguistic models to be used in the construction of language translation tools. To suit research projects targeted at these different areas, we had to develop a classification scheme that was flexible enough to record information about the types of errors that were commonly made.

The original basis for the error categories was taken from Houia (2002), where errors were organised into the categories of selection, addition, omission and ordering. However, we found that these broad categories did not provide enough precision for our purposes in developing computer support for te reo Maori learners. We needed to be more specific about what is selected, added or omitted. To begin with, we divided errors into grammatical errors relating to the use of “closed-class” Maori words and particles, errors in vocabulary relating to “open-class” words, and errors in dialogue structure. Within these categories, we retained Houia’s classification of selection, addition and omission.

The classification that we have developed makes it easy to capture information about the types of errors that are typically made by learners of te reo Maori.

- The classification is quick and easy to use,
- A simple, standardised procedure describes how it can be used,
- It is flexible enough to allow new categories of error to be introduced and more detail to be recorded about existing types of error,
- It captures detail about specific errors as well as general types of error.

This last point is critical for the effectiveness of our work as it provides independence between the analysis of source texts and subsequent software development work based on that analysis. We have measured the reliability of the classification procedure and this allows us to use the classification for different purposes and be able to make the classification available to other researchers for their own use.

References