

PRAGMATICS OF NEW ZEALAND VOCABULARY OF FOOD

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Like other national and regional forms of English, the New Zealand variety is most distinctive in its oral rather than in its written and printed forms. New Zealanders are recognized above all by their speech, by features of accent inevitably present in every spoken New Zealand utterance. The present article is devoted to the investigation of the denotation of food concepts in New Zealand English.

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Behind every language lies a fascinatingly intricate structure, which contains much more than a simple set of symbols. Language is not merely a code used to switch a text from one idiom to another, but an entity with its own complex, intriguing characteristics. In fact, exact translations do not even exist from one language to another because every dialect possesses unique aspects that have come about from centuries of social change and interaction. In return, language, through everyday speech, as well as literature, shapes society [3, p. 15].

New Zealand has a long history of immigration, particularly by the British who brought their language and culture to the new colony. The majority of the inhabitants of the region is Maori. Though regional diversity is limited now one might expect that, over time, both physical and social distance will have the effect of increasing regional differences in OZ and NZ, that is, on the one hand, the probability of increasing linguistic diversity in New Zealand has been very high due to the absence of a prestige variety in the country until recently. Furthermore, caused by geographical isolation between urban and rural areas with the latter preserving dialectal variation a high number of varieties could develop. On the other hand increasing globalization might diminish the number of varieties. However, as a dialect is always part of social identity the prospects for growing linguistic variation in NZ are positive [4, p. 18].

Distinctive local vocabularies everywhere are made up of two broadly different kinds of usage: the words and meanings that have

reference only in the region in question (most from Maori in New Zealand), lacking equivalents in other varieties of English and the others that have more general reference. So that alternative words for the same thing are possible in different places. Further we would like to investigate semantic differentiation of British and New Zealand vocabulary dealing with different items of food and drink.

a) Vocabulary of Drinking

From the earliest days of European discovery and settlement, whalers and sealers brought alcohol. In the early days of rural settlement, alcohol was the single man's salvo to the isolation and ruggedness of a lien existence. Boundary shepherds and out-station managers were amongst those who succumbed, and alcoholism was commonly referred to as *runholders' disease*. Shepherds, station hands, and shearers would rush to town to *lamb down* their pay cheques, i.e. spend it at the nearest public house. As prohibition took hold, a unique use of the term *dry area* developed in New Zealand English.

Soon words were generated for the products of illicit stilling and brewing, ranging from *bush beer*, *bush whisky*, *cabbage tree rum*, *chain lightning*, *colonial brew*, *hokonui*, *matai beer*, *paikaka* ('it had a kick like a mule'), and *tutu beer*, to *sheep wash* and *Waitohi dew*. *Sly groggers* were known in New Zealand by a variety of names, including *dropper* and *blind tiger*. They operated *sly groggeries* or *shanties*, where home-made alcohol was available to all [2, p. 310].

Waipiro (rotten water) was an early name borrowed from te reo as a general term for alcohol, while *titoki* was a common borrowing for beer or shandy. Even dogs contributed to the lexis of alcohol. A *dog collar* is froth on beer, while to have *a dog tied up* was to owe money for drink. The word *fence* was compounded with others when alcohol was mixed with ginger beer, hence *rum fence*, *sherry fence*, and *stone fence* (brandy and ginger beer) [1, p. 128].

Beer brewing and drinking has had its own vocabulary. To *chew hops* was to drink beer, or in other words, to have a *brown bomber*.

Too much of a good thing could produce a *beer goitre* or pot belly. Amongst the shearing fraternity and sorority, *beer o'clock* was the time to 'knock off' work for the day. In fact, beer was often known as *shearers' joy* or *Tommy Dodd*.

To gatter one's clay one might have done in New Zealand (drink

beer), but elsewhere beer was actually known as *gatter*. Cockney rhyming slang was adopted to codify beer as *pig's ear*, while too much gave one *the Joe Blakes* (the shakes). One then recovered with a *nurse* (an alcoholic pick-up drink) and the empties or dead marines were collected in *bottle drives* [6, p. 97].

Alcohol produced by amateurs usually resulted in unpalatable or potent drinks known as *green liquor*, *purple death* (cheap red wine), *purge*, or *panther purge*. No doubt even more unpalatable was methylated spirits, known as *steam* by those in the know. Steam drinkers were likely *to be Jimmy Woodsers*, *to drink Jimmy Woodsers*, or *to drink with the flies*, all the equivalent of drinking alone. An *Anzac Day dinner* was the term for a liquid lunch, perhaps with *Anzac shandy*, a beer and champagne mix [7, p. 81].

The more New Zealanders drink, the more *mullocked*, *munted*, *shickered*, *sliced*, *steamed*, or *wasted* they would become. The term *shicker* has had both noun and adjectival uses – for alcohol, for drunkenness, and for an intoxicated person. Further examples are taken from the online version of NZ newspaper “The Truth” [17, online]:

- *Graham Roberts, a prohibited remittance man, whose lapse into shicker was detailed in last week's "Truth", caused some disturbance amongst the "trade" by his arrest and conviction.*
- *It was the old trouble that the Magistrate had to decide when a man was sober and when he was in a state of shicker.*
- *A Christchurch man with a foreign moniker, who got run in for shicker, was found to be identical with one who was wanted on a charge of wife desertion in the North Island.*
- *Another chap and I saw an old shicker get fired out of the New Zealander hotel ...*
- *After midnight, Jerry got so shicker that he was quarrelling with everyone.*

New Zealanders left the *six o'clock swill* in the 1960s, in the attempt to make their drinking culture more ‘civilized’. Perhaps one can sense the *Tui moments* (*yeah, right*), hear the apposite response, and visualize the headshakes from the *wowsers* (used since the 1800s); the word meant a person disapproving of the pleasures of others, including the drinking of alcohol, but who was not a *teetotaling prude*. The word probably has its origins in the British dialect term *wow*, the verb ‘*to howl or bark as a dog*’, ‘*to whine or grumble*’. Because of its obscure

origins, people have suggested it is an acronym of the prohibitionists' catch cry "We Only Want Social Evils Reformed":

- *Well, call me a wowser but I don't want my bright, curious nieces sucked into premature sex and alcohol experimentation – or stupid fad diets for that matter* [9, p. 110].
- *He's no wowser. If you can afford it [gambling] and it's fun, fair enough* [9, p. 111].

Wowsers have been everything to everybody, as it provides a reflection of the changing attitudes and values of a society over time. Soon after its introduction, *wowser* became synonymous with *hypocrite*. The term *wowser* seems to have given churchmen a bad name – a minister of religion (*aka a harp-and-halo man*) being known as a *wowser-bird*, particularly among members of the armed forces. But New Zealand also gained a bad name, being referred to as *Wowserland* and a *wowser-ridden land* [11, p. 791].

b) Vocabulary of Sweets

In some British /New Zealand pairs, such as *sweet* and *lolly*, the 'British' term has currency here as well as the local variant, so that distinctive usage applies only in the New Zealand variety. The word *lolly*, in whatever sense and wherever its use, tends to be informally marked (the shortened *loll(s)*), and its use in New Zealand for *sweet* (equivalent to the more general *sweetie*) has been largely confined to children. There is also a North American/British contrast alongside the New Zealand/British, with *candy* contrastive with both *sweet* and *lolly* (or *sweets* and *lollies*) [12, p. 503].

As well as different words for the one thing here, we have an instance in *lolly* of one word denoting two different things, as it functions in British English as a shortening of *lollipop*, the meaning with which the New Zealanders use is contrastive. Oxford dictionaries derive it tentatively but plausibly from a dialect word *lolly* meaning 'tongue', a sweet therefore being something that one could 'pop' into the mouth for sucking (so said Eric Partridge in his *Origins*). Use of *lolly* for 'tongue' survives in northern English to this day [11, p. 315].

The performed investigation shows that the original meaning of unabbreviated *lollipop* was that of *lolly* in New Zealand today. The OED's earliest citation is from 1784:

- *She confessed that a certain person had enticed her to commit*

it, and given her sweetmeats, called lolly-pops.

- *That in the petticoat age we may fearlessly indulge in lollipop.*
- *The irreclaimable and hopeless votary of lollypop* [13, p. 284].

The first recorded Australian use of lolly is from 1854, and it appears first in the New Zealand record in the following decade. As well as the simplex *lolly*, numerous compound forms and several idiomatic phrases are recorded in New Zealand English that incorporate and further entrench the distinctive meaning of the word down under. Some of these are merely the equivalents of British English forms containing sweet, such as *boiled lolly*, *cough lolly*, *lolly jar* (Australian *lolly tin*), *lolly-maker* (confectionery manufacturer), *lolly money* (money to buy sweets), *lolly paper*, *lolly shop*. A *British Lolly Shop* is a New Zealand shop selling British sweets, not a British shop selling lollipops. The originally Victorian *conversation lozenge* was similarly converted to *conversation lolly* in New Zealand:

- *I don't suppose many people today would remember what 'conversation lollies' were like. They were little flat pink and yellow and white lollies with things printed on them, like 'Will you be my sweetheart?' or something of the sort.*

The *sweet shop* (or *candy store*) becomes the *lolly shop* in a common simile expressing delight at an available range of options, or just sheer delight:

- *We never ventured further than 5 km from the Royal Hotel and found so many possibilities that we were like kids in a lolly shop* [16, online].
- *The people who attended never in their wildest dreams imagined that they would ever step foot inside a gym. On the first day of the Lifestyle classes one of the staff members described the participants as 'children in a lolly shop'.*

In one or two cases it's North American constructions that are being translated into local idiom, rather than British. *Candy-pink* converts to *lolly-pink* (*a lolly-pink party hat, a lolly-pink sunset*); *lolly-blue* however is more original to New Zealand. Hence the *lolly tosser* in the following has no connection with the *lolly scramble* discussed later:

- *And while this was going on, what was the lolly tosser doing?... maybe she was just looking for somewhere to dematerialise as her company had done.*

However, New Zealand English has also developed a number of

coinages that have no equivalents in English outside of this region. Among our more original compound forms are *lolly cake* (a slice made with coloured fruit puffs), *lolly water* (soft drink, the term also employed to disparage weak alcoholic drinks), *paper lolly* (a wrapped sweet), *smokers' lollies* (a longer form of *smokers*, breath-sweetening pink cachous), and the unique *landing lollies* offered to descending Air New Zealand passengers. The *lolly stick* that a British *lolly* is now held by, was formerly in New Zealand and Australia an actual sweet – in the shape of a stick:

- *They would be the minute after [quarrelling] 'licking the same lolly-stick'.*

Several figurative applications of the word *lolly* itself have emerged. It seems to be applied to the head only in New Zealand, even though the analogy is with the British meaning of the word as *lollipop* (a large round circular thing on a stick), especially in the phrase *do one's lolly*, that is 'to have a temper fit' (as a local variant on *do one's nut bun*, *block*, etc.). *Do one's lolly* meaning 'to spend all one's money' is also a New Zealandism, the verb *do* here being distinctive rather than the noun *lolly*.

There is finally an ironic or euphemistic use of generalized *lollies* in the phrase *give someone their lollies*:

- *When spoken to by police Julian admitted injuring the boy, who, he said, had tried to 'worm in' on Julian's girlfriend. So Julian 'gave him his lollies'.*

Notwithstanding all of these, the standout item among the entirely homegrown *lolly* compounds must surely be the *lolly scramble*. This activity is one of the more distinctive New Zealandisms (not shared with Australian English), and the word has lately become extremely common and versatile in its applied non-literal uses:

- *The usual lolly scramble...served to add to the enjoyment of the kiddies [10, p. 50].*
- *Oh joy oh boy, the lolly scramble, a hellashun big tin and Mr. Stevens shouting and hurling them into the air, a great coloured fan, plop, plop, plop into the grass [11, p. 310].*

Since then the word has been a frequent metaphorical prop in discussion of government budgets and the pre-election promises of political parties:

- *Those still hoping the finance minister would be master of ce-*

remonies at the sort of sectoral lolly-scramble which has characterized many New Zealand budgets were disappointed [14, online].

- *The co-leader of the Maori Party says her party won't be joining what she calls a lolly scramble, as the major political parties roll out details of significant tax relief.*
- *Once again the single, lower-paid worker misses out on the lolly scramble and continues to prop up the tax benefits promised to families under Labour.*

This non-literal use of *lolly scramble* in contexts of finance is particularly appropriate and effective because it allows a play on the two main New Zealand senses of *lolly* – as ‘sweet’ and as ‘money’ (the latter a Britishism dating from the 1940s). The two meanings become fused; money takes over from sweets completely. The same potential for double meaning exists with figurative uses of *lolly jar*:

- *The Govt has been putting its little mittens in the lolly jar and there is a serious lack of money in the levy bucket. In the event of a major earthquake (a matter of when not if) then it will all look rather pear shape* [15, online].

It should be stated that as well as a distinctive word for its sweets in general, New Zealand has many of its own named confectionery items. Specific Kiwi *lollies* such as *blackballs*, *jaffas*, *minties*, *milk-shakes*, *smokers*, *pineapple chunks*, and *chocolate fish* (and chocs as *lollies*, the *Crunchie*, *Moro*, *Pinky*, *Milky Bar*, et al.) make for an appetising lexical *lolly scramble*.

We may conclude that the Kiwi *lolly* is certainly no longer confined to contexts involving children. Commonly in a developing regional lexis a single distinctive item has over time generated a small family of various derivative usages.

c) Maori words in the NZ Vocabulary of Food

The number of Maori words being used in New Zealand English is increasing. The research has shown that this increase is not just in the absolute number of Maori words but also in the number of different words. It is also generally accepted that this growth is largely driven by the addition to the New Zealand English lexicon of Maori words relating to social culture, words such as *powhiri*, *karakia*, and *whakapapa* [5, p. 81].

Inhabitants of these islands have, of course, always enjoyed food from the land and sea. Maori have always cultivated food crops, gathered wild foods, hunted, and fished. When Pakeha arrived, they did the same and in the process added Maori words to their English lexicon. *Weka* and *tui*, for instance, appear to have been favored eating among European settlers in the mid nineteenth century:

- *They brought back seven wekas with them, having cooked and eaten one for their lunch. ... We had supper, consisting of nice weka soup and some bread and weak* [5, p. 85].
- *We came home at six and dined on an Irish stew – most delicious. The tuis and other birds provide a rich treat for those who dwell near New Zealand woods.*

By the early years of the 20th century, eating habits had, to some extent, changed.

- *The tui is not so plentiful as it was some years ago. It has had the ill luck to have very tasty flesh when cooked, and the early settlers killed large numbers of these birds for food. Tui pie was, indeed, a favourite dish in nearly all households close to the forests.*

Today native birds are generally protected from a culinary fate. Maori lexical input from the world of food and drink is now coming from other quarters. Old favorites are being presented in new guises, such as *kumara wedges*, and re-acquaintance with indigenous foods has provided alternatives to the humble potato, through the cultivation, sale, and use of Maori potatoes or *taewa*. These come in different varieties and carry different names among which *huakaroro*, *karuparera*, *kowiniwini*, *moi moi* (or *moemoe*), *periperi* (or *peri*), *tutaekuri*, and *urenika* have been recorded. Its purple skin seems to have recommended *moi moi* to chefs in particular:

- *Chef Peter Thornley has created a special menu featuring such dishes as lamb roasted in seaweed and moi moi potato stew, inspired by Hotere's favourite foods.*

The shape of *tutaekuri* has excited comment such as the coy: *If you don't know the meaning of that, I'm not telling you, except to say that kuri means dog.*

Wild foods are rediscovered as well, and celebrated at wild food festivals, where there is far more on offer than *puha* and *huhu grubs*. Throw away the pepper-grinder for horopito, a small tree with pungent-

tasting leaves and sometimes known as the pepper-tree, has arrived:

- *Horopito pepper is another traditional ingredient that is being rediscovered.*

Contemporary uses include as a rub on beef or as an infusion in olive oil:

- *It is hot and peppery and was traditionally used for its medicinal value – it has anti-fungal properties.*

The aromatic leaves of *kawakawa* are finding their way into teas and pesto, while *miro* berries, if not in actual use, are being invoked by creative chefs.

- *Kai in the Bay doesn't yet have a supply of wild miro berries and seeks to replicate the citric flavour with orange and cranberry puree.*

Another wild food that has found favour is *ispikopiko*, or young fern fronds, at least in part for their decorative quality:

- *Pikopiko is increasingly used as a garnish, but was once a base vegetable used in soup-like meals.*
- *People from Rotorua would cook pikopiko in a hot box or steam box or they might boil it in salty water and add fish or mussels to make a sort of soup [51, online].*

Further we present a short description of some Maori words which became an integral part of NZ language of cuisine.

Hokey-pokey is a term for which the origin could be a cheap block of ice cream that used to be sold on the streets in Britain.

Afghan possibly has a synonym in desert roses in that they are both made with cornflakes and chocolate, but there is no exact equivalent of these biscuits outside of New Zealand, apart from in Australia.

Manuka honey is a product from the pollen of a New Zealand native tree and is certainly one of the most representative food products of the country. A successful export item, manuka honey is now known in other varieties of English, but it is always in the context of a New Zealand product.

Kiwis also love to entertain outside to make the most of our long warm summers. They call an outside grill or *barbecue* a *barbie* and also invite mates *round for a barbie* which is usually a casual invitation for dinner and often quite spontaneous. As well as *grilling the odd banger* (sausage) on a hotplate NZ also love outdoor meals cooked in a hole dug in the ground known as putting down a *hangi* (one among

many instances of borrowing from te reo Maori and it adds to the bi/multicultural identity of New Zealand). Some of the culinary treats cooked this way are foods such as *kumera* (a native sweet potato), *mutton-birds* (a native sea-bird) and of plenty of mutton (aged sheep) along with *puha* (a native green vegetable not unlike spinach) and a nice cold *bevvy* (beer); *cone* (for cornet – of ice cream) and *cake* (for bar – of soap or chocolate).

Indeed much of the growth in New Zealand's own special English lexis has been based on foundation elements such as *lolly*. The result is that New Zealandisms are not simply scattered in isolated fashion through the vocabulary, but increasingly form clusters of related forms just as in the word stock of English generally.

Thus the language of food being influenced both by the local inhabitants and the settlers is undoubtedly characterized by specificity and uniqueness, due to the importance and frequency of those cultural references, that lie on the basis of culture distinct region from its historical context – that of a British colony with a subordinate Maori population.

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