

## Submerged Language Surfaced

**B. Deva Shanthini**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Mary Matha College of Arts and Science  
Periyakulam East, Theni District, India

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### Abstract

This paper presents the submerged language surfaced. The domination of English language leads to cultural displacement. When the natives assimilate the alien language, their skill in their mother tongue declines. The older ones can pass on their rich culture and incredible history in songs and stories to the younger ones, only if their language survives. So survival of their language means survival of their history and up keeping their identity.

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Language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being in the world. It is distinctively a possession of a group, or race, or nation. It makes identity. Without language, the very concept of personhood and identity would be unintelligible. The language spoken in a geographic region clearly states, who had power in the past and who has power now. Undoubtedly this is twisted up with the West's imperial past. In a colonial regime, the colonial language becomes culturally more powerful, devaluing the native language. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins comment on the linguistic oppression encountered by the indigenous in their book, *Postcolonial Drama Theory, Practice, Politics*:

Language is one of the most basic markers of colonial authority... Forbidding people to speak their own tongues is the first step in the destruction of a culture... The loss of language leads to the possibility of loss of names, of oral history, and of connection to the land. (164)

The initial act in colonisation in New Zealand was to write significant indigenous oral texts in the coloniser's language. Translation transformed oral cultures of the indigenous into the "the lettered city". Robert J. C. Young records in *Translating between Cultures*, "Under colonialism, the colonial copy becomes more powerful than the indigenous original that is devalued. It will even be claimed that the copy corrects deficiencies in the native version" (140). The close links between colonisation and translation are not mere acts of exchange, but of violence, marginalization and appropriation.

The imperial power has instilled English as the medium of communication everywhere. Native language has become ugly and uncouth and English enjoys supremacy. White teachers are not familiar with the Maori registers of English and their accent, and punish the children even when they speak in English. Fear for punishment silences children in school. Niranjana Mohanty records in *Reclaim of Identity*, "One cannot spit out the mother

tongue when one lives in a different country and uses a different tongue” (24). But the Maori children are not able to spit out their language in their own land. Speaking their mother tongue in school is an offence. When Missy goes to school on the first day in Cousins, her brother Manny warns her, “... any kids talk Maori to you, you got to run away. Headmaster hit you with a big strap” (161). Even the old people do not have the liberty to use their native language. Mr. Williams, a Maori old man in Baby No Eyes brings his grandson, Waana to school. He talks to the little boy, in his language to keep him cheerful. The headmaster comes out and says in a loud voice, “I’d like to remind you Mr. Williams, that I don’t allow any of that language in my school or in the school grounds” (37). The poor old man does not take notice of him and keeps talking in their language. Provoked by the continuous use of the language, the headmaster shouts again, “I’m asking you to leave these grounds at once. Off you go and take your language with you. We’re not having any of that in my school and in front of these children” (...). The humiliated old man leaves the school saying, “I go, yes, take my grandson too” (...).

The novel focuses another incident, how speaking Maori language in school costs the life of an innocent native girl, Reripeti. The little girl always speaks in English in school. Once, when school reopens after holidays, she forgets to speak in English and speaks in her mother tongue. She is caned round her legs by her school master, Mr. Wood while Mrs. Wood gets her by the arm, so that she will not run away. Reripeti is afraid to go to school thereafter, and very soon dies out of fear of punishment. Her family stops talking their mother tongue. Later, her cousin, Kura narrates the story in her language to her grandson, Shane when he demanded the reason for giving him an English name: “I speak to you now in the language that I haven’t used since the time of Riripeti. I will never speak English again. By the time I die I hope to be again who I was born to be”(66). It is relevant to quote the most applauded words of Agnus and Roburtson in *Social Patterns in Australian Literature: The Social Element in Literature*, “None of us can ever escape from the irrevocable fate of always being ourselves. We are all bound to be Promethean rock of our ego by unbreakable chains” (4).

Kura becomes a Maori language activist. She pledges to promote their language in schools and many parents join hands with her because when their preschool kids turn five, they leave their Maori language behind. Kura meets Annabelle, the principal of the school situated in her family land and expresses her desire to make Maoritanga as the medium of instruction. She speaks in Maori and Mahaki, a reformist translates that into English to Annabelle, and explains that Kura is a Maori language activist, who has made up her mind never to speak English. Kura confines Maori children to communicate only in Maoritanga.

Many Maori however, think that speaking English will make them equal to the settlers. In the novel, Mutuwhenua, the heroin, Ngaio speaks in English even at home. She wants to marry Graeme, a White teacher but her grandmother, Ribeka advices her to marry a Maori. Ngaio tries to convince her saying, “I happen to like Graeme” (73). Nanny is irritated to hear her English idiom and says, “Happen to like, happen to like, what’s that talk? You talk like them already” (...). The old woman is afraid of losing their tribal language. Mata in Cousins lives in an English Home and speaks only English, and forgets the local language. When her relatives speak Maoritanga it sounds odd to her. Her cousin, Makerata felt

Maoritanga to be bad in her school days.

At school I saw my first language as something to be ashamed of, something that should be kept secret, a wrong and punishable thing - even though another part of me told me that it was language... by the time I Married Mick, I had not spoken my first language for more than ten years. I remember him being really surprised when he found out, after several years of marriage... (211)

The White government very often tempts the native tribes with a policy of all becoming one nation. "We are all one people, one law, one language" (Tu 131). The papers are full of it but it is never realised. The tribes come to conscious after a series of falls in life and realise that speaking English will not make them equal to the White. So they try to surface their native language which is submerged in the settlers' hegemony. Some of the elders discuss enthusiastically the promotion of their language, setting up language boards, training programmes and giving official recognition and equal constitutional and legal status to Maoritanga in the parliament. Makareta is well versed both in English and Maoritanga and determines to reclaim their language. She outbursts:

It was painful to me to think that we were asking for official recognition and equal status for, a language in its own homeland. This state of affairs, regarding the language seemed to epitomize all that happened to do with our land, our lives and our culture-having to ask, having to fit it to retain what was our own and that belonged nowhere else in the world but here. (210)

Her mother, Polly who never talked in Maoritanga to her, plans to teach it to other children. She tells Makareta, "They think if our children are taught their language... we won't be able to count our own toes" (209). Makareta is surprised, "I couldn't think how it would hurt or harm anyone if our children learned to speak the language of their parents and grandparents" (210).

As a result of their prolonged protest for about a year, and discussion in the parliament. Pre-schools are set up. People get renewed hope that, their language through their own initiatives and via the little children would survive. Makareta sends her younger son Michael to learn Maoritanga and become a proficient speaker of the language. Brave people demand government departments through mass media, "our culture and language have recognition in the various institutions, even though it was an injustice, an absurdity for a language and culture to be pleading its worth in the place that is its home" (215). As a result they hear their language in places where they had never heard it and in places where they never thought they would hear it.

A scene in the novel, Dogside Story nearly sums up the dilemmas and inherent irony involved in coveting the West's financial resources to support their community's needs, protecting their cultural identity and dignity by refusing to compromise on the issue of their language. Two protagonists, Wai and Dion organise a celebration to witness the millennial sunrise in New Zealand and advertise on the mass media to attract the White folks around. They decide to collect donation in an ice cream container, and Dion writes koha on it.

People coming there will be mostly the English. They may not know the meaning of Koha. So Wai suggests writing 'donation' on the container. Dion strongly objects, "But, but, but why? Why should we compromise our language? Compromise our language... for Americans" (222). So, Wai agrees on Koha itself. Cultural studies prove that, coexistence of cultures and languages is inevitable:

... hybridization and creolization of language, literature and cultural identities becomes a common theme in postcolonial literature. Neither the colonial nor the colonized cultures and languages can be presented in 'pure' form. They cannot be separated from each other, thereby giving rise to hybridity. This challenges not only the centrality of colonial culture and the marginalization of the colonized but the very idea of 'centre' and 'margin'. (Barker 163)

Maori literature in English is basically a bilingual literature, born to resist colonialist ideologies, of globalising Western culture and the English language. Although Patricia is of mixed origin, she always identifies herself as a Maori and writes in English with lavish use of Maori words. Her code switching technique from English to Maori and Maori to English has occurred occasionally in New Zealand literature and won worldwide admiration. She has released her novels without a glossary except her first one, though her audiences are mainly the Whites. This is a deliberate strategy to alienate White readers, and disempower White writers who claim universal status. John B. Beston comments in "The Fiction of Patricia Grace":

Patricia Grace 'seems to have meant for non-Maori people to feel lost and out-of-place in the reading'... Perhaps it's because by not having a glossary, the author is saying something about how the use of those words in another language is natural and that the language has equal weight with English? If you have a glossary, may be it implies that the language is weird and strange and Other. (4)

Michaela Mudure appreciates Patricia's code switching technique as a trick to assert Maori identity in a criticism:

Patricia's intertextuality is characterised by the use of numerous Maori words ... In this way the reader acquire by the end of his reading of the text a mini-vocabulary in the Maori language. It is an excellent stratagem for the salvation of Maori identity from the imperial force of the European models and it is an excellent linguistic device to make Maori identity visible and entice the reader, even if not very sympathetic, into its own universe. (The Atlantic Critical Review, Vol.2, No.11 January - March 2003.)

The Maori are loving people. They love other people, and other languages. They are polyglots. Whenever Maori battalion camped in European countries during wars, "Men enjoyed learning Greek, Italian and German songs which were soon picked up by the

people at home, and many of them became proficient in new languages” (Ned and Catina 47). They protest the linguistic aggression of the Whites, because their oral tradition is not recognized, and their language has no validity. The domination of English language leads to cultural displacement. When the natives assimilate the alien language, their skill in their mother tongue declines. The older ones can pass on their rich culture and incredible history in songs and stories to the younger ones, only if their language survives. So survival of their language means survival of their history and up keeping their identity.

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