



8 February 2024

Tēnā koe,

Re: Official Information Act (OIA) Request – dual language Māori English displays

I am writing in response to your email dated 2 January 2024 in which you requested a response to the following questions:

- *To what extent are dual language displays composed Māori first then translated into English, English first then translated into Māori, composed simultaneously, or something else?*
- *Why is it only "Titiro anō" on the Māori side of Example 1, as opposed to having only "Titiro anō" on the Māori side and only "Look again" on the English side? Or "Look again - titiro anō" on the Māori side?*
- *Are there specific guidelines for when the bilingual style is used?*
- *Why is it not "Aotearoa" or "Niu Tīreni" or "Motu" on the Māori side of Example 2? Or "Land of the long white cloud" or "mountains" or "North Island" on the English side?*
- *Are there specific guidelines for choosing between translations, loan words, interpretations for key words or phrases?*

This information was requested with regard to displays from the exhibition space Te Taiao | Nature:



Responses to each of your questions are provided below.

To what extent are dual language displays composed Māori first then translated into English, English first then translated into Māori, composed simultaneously, or something else?

It's difficult to quantify exactly what proportions of text are written according to the above approaches, but all are used depending on the context.

Since 2012, Te Papa has aimed to develop fully bilingual labels for all Te Papa-produced exhibitions, moving beyond the original approach where only some exhibitions were fully bilingual, and others partly bilingual. The process for each exhibition depends on a number of factors, including the curator's or knowledge holder's primary language, the exhibition content, and the target audience.

Te Papa's bilingual Writing Team most frequently works from briefs or drafts provided by curators. Because most curators' primary language is English, the reo Pākehā text is typically drafted before the reo Māori team begins their interpretive work. This is most often the case for exhibitions focused on Western science or Western art.

Producing Māori text for dual-language labels is rarely a matter of straight translation, however. Our reo Māori writers apply an interpretive approach to suit the target audience(s). Writers consider the levels of reo Māori that different visitor groups generally bring to an exhibition, as well as their different levels of immersion in and understanding of ao Māori perspectives. These different backgrounds bring with them different needs for explanation and contextualisation.

There are times when the reo Māori will lead the English, particularly for iwi exhibitions, or for exhibitions about taonga Māori or te ao Māori concepts. In these cases, a reo Māori writer will work with the curators or other knowledge holders (for example, iwi representatives) to draft labels in te reo Māori. This work sometimes occurs before development in English. At other times, the reo Māori and reo Pākehā writers work with the curators or knowledge holders in parallel, to develop text simultaneously.

As with the move from English to te reo Māori, the English text may not be a straight translation of the reo. Again, this is due to the differing needs of both audiences. The English writer/editor may see a need to explain or contextualise ideas more, or to simplify or streamline phrases or narratives. The final text in te reo Māori might be quite different from the English text – it might tell a different story or have a very different emphasis. A primary consideration for both languages is the accuracy and integrity of the mātauranga (knowledge) being shared.

We also recognise that there are contexts in which information should match as exactly as possible in both languages – for example, for contracts and other official documents, such as Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

More commonly, however, creating a bilingual experience for a museum audience differs from this type of translation, as it does from translating an author's or speaker's *existing* work (where a translation is expected to add nothing and remove nothing). Parallel writing means that agreed key messages inform the development of text in the respective languages, allowing for a greater degree of cultural autonomy in expression, and more nuance in sharing diverse cultural perspectives. Words in one language don't necessarily have an equivalent in the other after all. The final experience is also richer for those who can read both languages, compared with reading exactly the same information twice.

Why is it only "Titiro anō" on the Māori side of Example 1, as opposed to having only "Titiro anō" on the Māori side and only "Look again" on the English side? Or "Look again - titiro anō" on the Māori side?

This incorporation of high-use Māori words into English labels is an example of Te Papa's commitment to supporting the revitalisation of te reo Māori – an endangered language – and to exploring new ways to do that. Guided by *Maihi Karauna: The Crown's Māori Language Strategy*, and The Māori Language Act (2016), which affirms Māori as the indigenous language of New Zealand, we aim to promote the visibility and status of the language through our public communications, and to promote its learning.

In Example 1, the words 'Tītiro anō' are followed by their English counterparts in a way that encourages Māori-language learning by English speakers. By comparison, most speakers of te reo are already fluent in English, and English isn't an endangered language, so there isn't an equivalent need to incorporate 'Look again' into the reo Māori label.

If 'Tītiro anō' only appeared in the reo Māori text (ie, if the languages were kept entirely separate), English speakers would be less incentivised to engage with what the phrase means.

This approach is informed by learning theory. Our brains can easily slip into automatic mode and ignore new information if we're not motivated to engage with it in some way – if we don't need to understand it – especially in an informal learning environment like a museum. By incorporating a surprise or small challenge that makes visitors stop and think, we nudge them into learning mode. Another example is where we say 'flightless manu' rather than 'flightless birds' – the clue to the meaning of 'manu' is in the context. When such a challenge sparks a question or conversation between visitors, even better. That moment – that new information – instantly becomes more memorable.

This conversational style interweaving reo Māori and English reflects how New Zealanders increasingly speak, and helps normalise reo Māori further. The labels cited above appear in the exhibition zone Te Taiao | Nature, where the relatable figure of Māui is the guide, inspiring the 'voice' and style of the text.

[This 2019 blog](#) describes the Te Taiao | Nature approach in more detail. Also see this [2017 blog post](#), which outlines some early thinking around supporting language learning.

For work in this area, Te Papa was recognised as a [finalist in the 2019 Ngā Tohu Reo Māori – Māori Language Awards](#).

Are there specific guidelines for when the bilingual style is used?

As stated above, Te Papa strives to make all exhibition text bilingual, most importantly for exhibitions we develop, based on New Zealand collections.

The interwoven style described above is used primarily in exhibitions aimed at whānau (families) or tamariki (children). We also incorporate Māori words into English text in wayfinding signs, and other areas where icons can support learners' understanding.

We recognise that, in some instances, presenting te reo Māori and English separately, without interrupting their integrity, may be more appropriate – for example, where fluent Māori speakers are the primary audience, or where the subject matter is more sensitive.

As stated earlier, there are also contexts in which information in both languages should match as exactly as possible.

In short, there's no one approach for every situation, topic, or audience, but each contributes to upholding Article 2 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which recognises te reo Māori as a taonga (treasure), much like the other treasures we hold in our collections.

Why is it not "Aotearoa" or "Niu Tīreni" or "Motu" on the Māori side of Example 2? Or "Land of the long white cloud" or "mountains" or "North Island" on the English side?

Te Ika Whenua | Unique NZ is the name of the first exhibition in Te Taiao | Nature. *Te Ika Whenua* was chosen as the Māori name to reflect the changing nature of our geologically young landscape. It references the story of Māui fishing up the North Island – Māui being the guide throughout the exhibition zone, as stated above. In addition, the name serves to suggest the timeframe of the first exhibition, which is pre-human arrival, when animals like the giant moa were not yet extinct.

The choice to use *Te Ika Whenua* in place of *Aotearoa*, *Niu Tīreni*, or *Motu* follows the parallel approach outlined above. It reiterates the name of the exhibition in a more concrete context, offering Māori speakers greater insight into its meaning and usage.

Are there specific guidelines for choosing between translations, loan words, interpretations for key words or phrases?

Currently, there are no singular or simple guidelines for choosing between translations, loan words, and interpretations of key words or phrases, but a lot of thought goes into this. As explained, the area is nuanced and depends on context.

Te Papa's goal is always to increase the mana of te reo Māori. When dealing with phrases and concepts that weren't present in te ao Māori before colonisation, it can be preferable to develop new words, rather than relying on loan words. An excellent example of this detailed and complex decision-making process is the story of [the reo Māori naming of Ngā Taniwha o Rūpapa | Dinosaurs of Patagonia](#), our current summer blockbuster exhibition.

We also have a style guide that provides a list of basic 'glosses', or translations, for common words or phrases in te reo Māori. You can find a list of the most common glosses [online here](#). However, this is not always definitive guidance, since translations and interpretive glosses depend on context.

Te Papa has an informal list of 'reo Kiwi' words. These are words that have entered broad public understanding and can remain un-glossed for some local audiences, such as schools – for example, whānau, aroha, kai, koha, kia ora. This helps to normalise the words further, and build their use in everyday language.

Both te reo Māori and te reo Pākehā are continually evolving, as is the New Zealand public's understanding of them. Te Papa aims to be responsive to these changes over time.

If you are not satisfied with this response you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request with us please contact OIA@tepapa.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely



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