The Maori Language

Aotearoa is the native name for my home country — it means literally 'land of the long white cloud'. Little is heard of the Maori language outside New Zealand and most Kiwis, although familiar with many Maori place-names, remain blissfully ignorant of their meanings.

If a logologist had been asked in the mid-1960s for his favourite Maori word, chances are he would have said 'zzxjoanw' (if he could pronounce it). This unbelievable absurdity is listed in The Music Lovers' Encyclopedia, compiled by Rupert Hughes, and published in many editions during the first half of the century. It is also mentioned in Dmitri Borgmann's Language on Vacation (Scribner's, 1965) where it is said to be Maori for (a) drum (b) fife (c) conclusion. Amazingly, it is only in recent times that this incredible arrangement of letters has been discredited.

The Maori alphabet has only fourteen letters (a,e,g,h,i,k,m,n,o,p,r,t,u,w), and all words in the language end in a vowel, so obviously zzxjoanw is merely a contrivance.

Maori palindromes are not common, but I have come across the following:

aha what
aka rata vine
apa slave
ata form
eke to ground
iri hang
iwi nation
ono six
oro grind
uhu stiffness
utu reward
anana indeed
asaara trevally
awaawa valley
epeepe distant relations
eweeaw blood relations
ihithi terror-struck
iriiri baptise
ohooho requiring care
okooko to nurse
uruuru to hasten

Two longer examples are aninanina, meaning 'giddy', and the given name Aratotara. There are also several palindromic Maori placenames: Oeo, Oio, Aoroa and Akaaka.

Tautonyms are much more evident, and the language abounds with...
words like kuhukuhu (pig), weriweri (offensive), papapa (shell) and ngongengonge (crippled), as well as places like Matamata, Pakipaki and Whanawhana. To illustrate the variety of Maori placenames throughout New Zealand, here is a small, but interesting, selection from my own, relatively small, province: Aroarotahuri, Te Huingaongawananga, Kokomoko, Mangarangara, Te Matalateua, Raoraaro, Kotewhepariorangaitehahaire, Tukikokoko, Whataangaanga, and of course the famous 85-letter Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu.

There is no evidence that the ancient Maoris indulged in any form of word-play, but they did have many delightful sayings, such as 'Papaku a ringaringa, hohonu a korokoro', which means 'the hand is shallow, but the throat is deep', an allusion to gluttony.

It would be a great pity if the Maori language were to fall into disuse, but it is an unfortunate fact that fewer and fewer people are able to actually speak it, and as the old Maoris die a little bit of Maar itanga (culture) and mana (influence) dies with them. Hopefully the new generation will preserve the Maori tongue, which has, after all, been spoken for over a thousand years. I for one would not like to lose logological curiosa like ahuaatua (rudeness), awakeawake (four days off), hamamamama (yawn), kikikiki (stutter), kuwhewhewhe (wrinkled), ouou (few), rape (tattooing on the buttocks), tetetete (chatter), tumhuru (to ill-treat a relative), and whakatakataka (to roll from side to side).

Logonumerics

Dmitri Borgmann has discovered the following bit of logologico-numerological abracadabra. Using the scoring system A = 1, B = 2, etc., the sums of the letters in TIME and SPACE, the framework in which the physical universe is set, are 47 and 44, respectively. Turn these numbers inside out, replacing a 4 with a 7 and a 7 with a 4, converting them to 74 and 77. These are the sums of the letters in ENERGY and MATTER, the two entities found in the framework of space and time. 74 and 77 are also the sums of the letters in JESUS CHRIST, the spiritual element of the universe as opposed to its physical substance. If the original numbers 47 and 44 are reversed, yielding 47 and 44, these are the sums of the letters in LUCIFER and GODHEAD, opposites in eternal combat. (For further commentary on LUCIFER, see the August 1981 Word Ways.) Finally, if the original numbers 47 and 44 are added, yielding 91, this is the sum of the letters in both SPIRIT and DARKNESS, similarly locked in combat.

Oxford Oddities

In earlier issues of Word Ways mention has been made of so-called 'overspecialized words' -- those that have definitions seemingly too incredible to be represented by a single word. Some of my favourites are 'ucalegon', a neighbor whose house is on fire, 'nosarian', one who argues that there is no limit to the possible largeness of a nose (anti-
In any form of language, such as 'Papaku', the shallow, fall into disuse, are able to actually laitianga (culture) generation will broken for over itical curiosa mamamama (few), mumuruuru (to move side).

X-Ouiz It

There are fewer words starting with 'X' than any other letter, so perhaps we should be more familiar with them. If asked for x-words most people would come up with xylophone, Xmas and X-ray, but as word buffs we should know some of the rarer ones. How many of the following Oxford terms can you identify?

1. the yellow colouring matter of leaves in Autumn
2. fearing foreign persons or things
3. a small, three-masted sailing vessel
4. sword-shaped
5. a fork-tailed gull
6. a volatile liquid obtained from wood-spirit
7. cross-fertilization
8. a primitive, rudely carved image or statue
9. an ill-tempered woman or wife
10. wood-engraving
11. excessive dryness of the hair
12. an instrument for scraping bones
13. a plant adapted to a dry climate or habitat
14. a stone or rock found among rocks to which it does not belong
15. the process of polishing
16. yellow colouring-matter obtained from madder
17. a heavy, inert gas
18. the posterior division of the sternum
19. an open colonnade, or walk, planted with trees
20. presents given to a guest or stranger

The answers can be found in Answers and Solutions at the back of this issue.

Fo'c's'le or Fo'c's'le?

Does the common abbreviation of 'forecastle' have two apostrophes or three? This question recently arose when George Roberts of San Diego, California sent in the title 'Fo'c's'le Yarns' by Thomas Edward Brown, found on page 19 of the History of the Isle of Man by A.W. Moore, published in 1900. It gained added point when the editor, on a visit to Ketchikan, Alaska, noted a waterfront establishment named the Fo'c's'le Bar. Then the editor's wife ran across an article on Moby Dick in the June 1981 issue of The Lookout (of the Seamen's Church Institute of NY and NJ) which began 'It was a yarn for nights in fo'c's'les ...

So what's the problem? Simply this: almost without exception, unabridged dictionaries insist that fo'c's'le is the proper abbreviation: Webster's Second, Webster's Third, the Oxford English Dictionary. The only support for fo'c's'le in a large dictionary is found in the Random House Unabridged, where both spellings are shown. (Funk and Wagnalls has neither.) Surprisingly the Shorter Oxford also lists both spellings, and the Pocket Oxford has fo'c's'le. Can readers find other examples in dictionaries or the real world that will help explain this inconsistency?

Sit On A Potato Pan, Otis

This is one of the sentence palindromes in Dmitri Borgmann’s Language on Vacation. Until this summer, the editor thought he would never have a chance to use it in a logical context. Visiting the Ice Caves near Paradise on the southern slopes of Mount Rainier, he included in a home movie a scene showing a youth sliding down a 45-degree snow slope on his feet while his girl friend watched from below, addressing him as Otis. Unable to restrain himself, the editor sidled up to Otis and asked if he didn't find sliding on his feet rather difficult -- wouldn't some sort of sled or flat plate make it easier? Then the coup de grace: 'My advice, in fact, would be to sit on a potato pan, Otis'. Otis looked at the editor as if he had taken leave of his senses, while his girl friend giggled nervously. It may be that this history was made, but some of the participants still don't know what happened!
A friend of mine recently came across the word 'Strad' in a book he was reading. Being unsure of its meaning he checked the dictionary and found that it is a shortened form of 'Stradivarius', a violin made by Antonio Stradivari of Cremona, whose instruments are renowned for their tone and beauty of design. He also noticed that 'Strad' spelt backwards becomes 'darts', instruments of a totally different kind.

Elated by this discovery, he looked further and was surprised to see that by removing the first letter of 'Strad' he was left with 'trad', another abbreviation (of traditional, as in trad jazz). Curious, he then removed the 't', leaving 'rad', an abbreviation of 'radical' shown in the Oxford. From there it is only a short step to 'ad', a common shortening of 'advertisement'. I wonder if anyone can think of a similar series of beheadments, where the words formed in each step are abbreviations.

True Rhopalisms

According to Dmitri Borgmann in Language on Vacation (Scribner's, 1965), a sentence beginning with a one-letter word, followed by a two-letter word, then a three-letter word, and so on, is called a 'snowball' sentence, or, more technically, a rhopalic sentence or rhopalism. Here is one from Time magazine, January 10, 1977, followed by a longer, but somewhat more obscure example:

O to see Man's stern poetic thought publicly expanding recklessly imaginative mathematical inventiveness, openmindedness unconditionally superfecundating nonantagonistical, hypersophisticated, interdenominational interpenetraibilities

It is of course possible to construct rhopalic sentences conforming to certain restrictions, as in the following effort:

I do not seek alien inness, illness, idleness, ineptness, impureness, ignobleness, illusiveness, invidiousness, irresoluteness, impracticalness, incorrigibleness, indeterminateness, irreconcilableness, incommunicativeness, incomprehensibleness, indistinguishableness, incircumscribibiliness

Interestingly, the Oxford English Dictionary states that a rhopalic verse is one in which each word contains one syllable more than the one immediately preceding it. So it looks as if we need some examples of
true' rhopalisms -- here is one to start the ball rolling:

Some people completely misunderstand administrative extemporization -- idiosyncratical antianthropomorphism undenominationalizing politico-ecclesiastical honorificabilitudinity

Diversions

The New Zealand Listener is a weekly publication with a wide circulation, partly attributable to the fact that it carries an advance radio and television programme summary. However it also contains interesting articles and reviews, a good cryptic crossword, as well as an excellent Diversions column. Word Ways readers may be interested in some of the contests run in this column.

a. If words like 'boycott' and 'sandwich' have been added to the English language by derivation from the names of people in the past, what would be the meaning of words derived from the names of well-known New Zealanders of the present day? Here is a small selection of readers' suggestions:

- toogood, noun -- misplaced charity, random donation of material goods to persons not necessarily in need (Selwyn Toogood hosts a TV quiz cum give-away show)
- fletcher, noun -- a monster of benign appearance, with a voracious appetite for lesser fry, e.g. 'The owner of a small business these days must struggle to keep the fletcher from his door' (Fletcher is the name of a large multinational company)
- wellington, noun -- type of protective clothing that teachers won't wear (Merv Wellington is the Minister of Education)
- muldoon, noun -- a stately dance in which one moves in small circles to the left while facing right (Muldoon is the Prime Minister)
- rondon, adj. -- forthright; three-fourths wrong, as in 'Ron Don is rondon' (Ron Don is an outspoken rugby official)

b. Readers were asked to invent acronyms -- derivations for everyday words which might apply if they were formed from initial letters of a descriptive phrase, for example Sharp Hand Operated Vertical Earth Lifter for 'shovel'. Parts of the upper body proved a fertile subject for suggestions, from Hard Ended Adding Device to Automatic Random Manipulator, by way of Elementary Auditory Receptor, Natural Olfactory Sensory Extension, Box Retaining Assorted Interesting Notions, Muscular Orifice Usually Toothed & Hungry, complete with Stretched Mouth Indicating Likeable Experience. Clothing included Bust Raising Apparatus, Body Encircling Leather Trouser-holder, and Globular Lightweight Anterior Sight Enrichment System. Many other miscellaneous suggestions were sent in:

- Bottled Effluent Encouraging Regurgitation Carcinogenic Incendiary Gadget Attenuating Respiration A Loud And Remorseless Metallic Clang Leaving One Completely Kayoed
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Agricultural Product People Love Eating
Luminous Incandescent Gadgets Helpful To Sight
Disciplined Intake Encouraging Thinness

(Editor's Note: for further examples of this genre, see the February 1973 Kickshaws.)

c. In an anagram contest featured by Diversions, many entrants couldn't resist having a go at transposing the name of our Prime Minister, ROBERT MULDOON. Supporters described him as OUR BOLD MENTOR, and as a man BORN TO REMOULD. Others exhorted, MEND OUR LOT, ROB! knowing there was ROOM TO BLUNDER. Those less kind considered him a BLURTER ON DOOM, and even a TROUBLED MORON or BURNT OLD ROMEO; a ROTUND BLOOMER who simply TROD ON MOB-RULE. Some people were more cryptic with their anagrams, using terms like BOOMER OLD RUNT MR. O. UNTOLD BORE and ROTUNDO LE MORB. I don't know if Rob Muldoon ever reads this column, but I think he may have appreciated some of these 'diversions'.

May this column continue to thrive -- it shows that word-play is alive and well in New Zealand.

The Hardest Natural Languages

Recently the editor received an offprint of an article by Arnold Rosenberg, a computer scientist at IBM, who published it under the above title in Linguisticae Investigationes III:2 (1979). Rosenberg defines Language A to be harder than Language B if there is in Language B a phrase of the form "It's A to me" (or some syntactical equivalent), meaning that the speaker cannot understand what is being said. For instance, when one says "It's Greek to me" one implies that Greek is a harder language than English. If, in turn, Language B can be shown to be harder than Language C by a statement in Language C, Rosenberg argues that Language A has been shown to be harder than Language C (even in the absence of any statement to this effect in Language C).

By building up a tree of such relationships, Rosenberg proves conclusively that Chinese is the hardest natural language: there are statements in Spanish, Latin, Greek, Polish, Hebrew, Finnish, Estonian, Flemish, Hungarian, Romanian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Swiss-German and Tagalog all attesting to this. In turn, English, Afrikaans and Portuguese are dominated by Greek; French is dominated by Hebrew; and Czech, German and Dutch are dominated by Spanish.

Rosenberg also discovered that Persian is dominated by Turkish (the Persian "Turki gofti?" means "Did you say it in Turkish?"), Turkish is dominated by Arabic (the Turkish "Anladimsa arab olayim!" means "If I understood that, I'd be an Arab"), and Arabic is dominated by Persian, closing the circle (the Arabic "Kalam ajami" means "It's
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Persian to me"). These three languages are also linked by a proverb in Persian: "Arabic is a language, Persian is a sweetmeat, and Turkish is an art".

A Geography Quiz

Leslie Card of Urbana, Illinois likes to make lists of logologically interesting words. How quickly can you discover the raison d'etre of the following collection of United States cities, towns and villages listed in the Official Zip Code Directory? What state is missing from the list, and why?

Florida: Venus
Idaho: Bern, Burke, Burley, Felt, Peck
Iowa: Burt, Ely, Huxley, Jesup, Kent, Luther, Peru, Ruthven, Shelby, Struble, Sumner, Ulmer, Ute
Maine: Bucksport, Togus, Troy, York
New York: Bath, Big Flats, Cuba, Lima, Utica
Texas: Blum, Boling, Boyd, Bruni, Bynum, Cordi, Cumby, Dublin, Floyd, Guy, Hico, Juno, Krum, Lodi, Lohn, Loving, Lufkin, Lyford, Mico, Milford, Mound, Murphy, Plum, Purdon, Richmond, Roby, Vidor, Whon, Windom, Wink
Utah: Beryl, Elmo, Milford, Ogden, Orem, Price, Roy
Wyoming: Beulah, Casper, Elk, Lusk, Slater

Verbose Verse

Samuel Beckoff of Monroe, New York recently sent the editor brief poems which he christens Verbose Verse:

Maple Syrup in the Spring
Be on Time, or Else!
How to Get on the Stage
Passion Exhausted
The Final Illness
The Widow's Lament

In similar vein, does anyone remember the poem Hired/Tired/Fired! which the editor recalls (perhaps in Robert Ripley) many years ago?

The Guinness Book of World Records cites "On the Antiquity of Microbes" (from the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations) as the shortest poem in the world: Adam/Had 'em. However, this has frequently been bested. For example, Mitchell Porter of Toowoomba, Queensland came up recently with these "Last Words": I/Die.

Martin Gardner, in his notes at the back of Bombaugh's Oddities and Curiosities of Words and Literature (Dover, 1961), cites "On the Condition of the United States After Several Years of Prohibition": Wet/Yet as the record-holder for many years. However, Eli Siegel's poem "One Question": 1/Why?, which first appeared in the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post in 1925, is shorter. A further improve-
ment was achieved by "Reactions to a Statement by Khruschev that the Soviet Union Has No Desire to Meddle in the Affairs of Other Nations": O/So?.

In Another Almanac of Words at Play (Clarkson N. Potter, 1980), Willard Espy cites Roy Breunig's poem on a case of Old Testament intoxication: Lot/Sot. Perhaps the shortest poem ever coined is the one by Espy which phonetically records the conversation between the British ambassador's wife and the Spanish ambassador's wife when the latter pays an afternoon social call on the former: "T?"/"C."

An Unusual Crossword

Finally, for crossword fans, here is a challenge. The object is to find the two 22-letter horizontal words by solving the 22 vertical 3-letter words. All words and definitions are taken from the Oxford English Dictionary.

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12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22

Down:
1. a friend or gossip (dialed)
2. Russian village community
3. up-to-date, stylish
4. a measure of weight
5. a distinctive doctrine
6. both of us (archaic)
7. a friend
8. horse-drawn vehicle
9. slang for 'detective'
10. a semi-solid
11. icy (early spelling)

12. to unite
13. a lump
14. straight line
15. exclamation of contempt
16. to go astray
17. water
18. male animal
19. the highest point
20. to contend or compete
21. a negative response
22. cunning

The solution can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.
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