Nova Zelandia est Omnis Divisa in Partes Tres

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Although New Zealanders agree that Southlanders talk differently from people in the rest of the country, and are aware of some variation in vocabulary e.g. *crib* vs. *bach*, there is little scientific research on regional dialects in New Zealand. Gordon (1997) shows that lay people believe that there are regional varieties in New Zealand, but in general the linguistic literature has commented on the regional homogeneity of New Zealand English more than its diversity. If there are indeed regional varieties, but New Zealand linguists have not identified them, perhaps it is because the linguists have been looking at the wrong data, or in the wrong places.

This research, funded by the Marsden Fund, set out to investigate children's playground vocabulary. The aim was to look for any evidence of regional or social variation, and to consider both the conservative and the innovative facets of children's language behaviour. Children were chosen on the basis that if regional dialects are in the very early stages of development in NZ, they might show up in the language of children, but not adults; if they are established, they could be expected to show up in both. Playground language was chosen because that is not directly under the influence of teachers, who are a mobile group, and can be expected to produce dialect levelling throughout the country. Vocabulary was chosen because that is relatively easily recorded and analysed, those factors being necessary to make a survey of such wide scope practical. It was decided that children of 11-12 years of age would be close enough to young children to report what they say, while being old enough to reflect on their own usage, and, we hoped, not too strongly influenced by teenage and adult norms. No assumptions were made about likely dialect areas: the intention was to sample the entire country fairly closely, and to allow the data to show up possible areas of divergence.

A database was obtained of all schools with children in Years 7 and 8 (Forms I and II, ages normally 11-12). About 1550 relevant schools were plotted on a map of NZ, a grid was drawn on the map, and one school was selected at random from each box where possible. (The boxes were 30 x 37 kilometres; many boxes had no schools; others had schools too small to approach.) For the larger urban areas, a grid was drawn on a street map, and schools were selected in proportion to the population. We initially approached 341 schools and asked for assistance. When schools indicated that they were unable to help, we sought help from another school in the same box where possible. Ultimately 150 schools from Kaitaia to Bluff participated. We sincerely thank the students, teachers and schools that made this research possible.

Students from Years 7 and 8 (Forms I and II) provided the data. The teacher presented a questionnaire orally to the class, and recorded the responses. (There was some variation in the procedure followed by the

teachers: some had the children write their responses, and the teacher then transferred common responses to the questionnaire; a few returned the individual children's answer sheets. Most, however, appear to have done as requested.) There were some important problems inherent in the methodology: certain types of playground language were not readily repeated in some classrooms, so there was a good deal of voluntary censorship, but in general, the censored items were not those of greatest interest to us. For similar reasons, certain types of question were unaskable: teachers who piloted the survey did not find it acceptable to ask questions designed to elicit words for negative stereotypes (e.g. *copycat, butterfingers*), because they try to teach children not to brand others in this way. Because there is an emphasis on the 'creative' use of language in classrooms, the sort of language we were eliciting was also a misfit. This had the effect of upsetting a few teachers, and eliciting from some children the sort of language which the teachers would approve of. We gave serious consideration to alternative methods of data collection, but these were either financially impossible, or would have led to enormous difficulties in processing children's non-standard spellings (is *caned* the same word as *canned*, or different? what word does *wie* represent?). We decided that we had no option financially other than to proceed using the teacher as intermediary.

The questions we asked included the names of some common games, set phrases (e.g. what you say on the first of the month), greetings, words for expressing feelings, and a few words for behavioural stereotypes. Many teachers reported that they and their students had enjoyed the task, or found it interesting, or both, but it was also clear that some teachers did not.

We are still in the early stages of analysing the data. Much of it is extremely complex, but the results from the simplest sets of data are fascinating. We present the detailed results from two questions below, and then outline the general patterns which seem to be emerging.
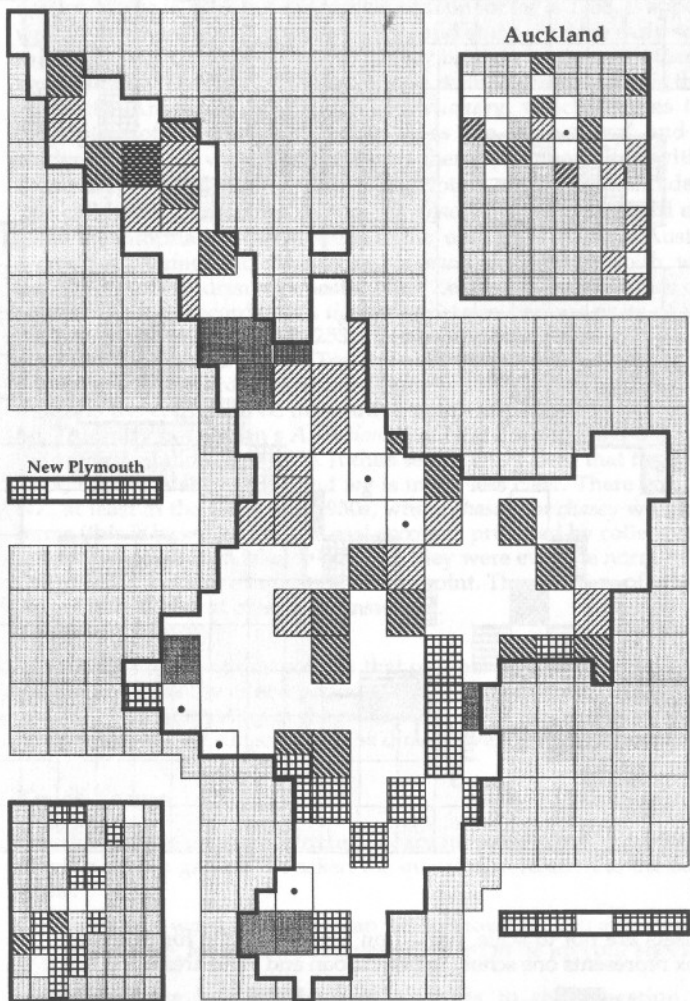
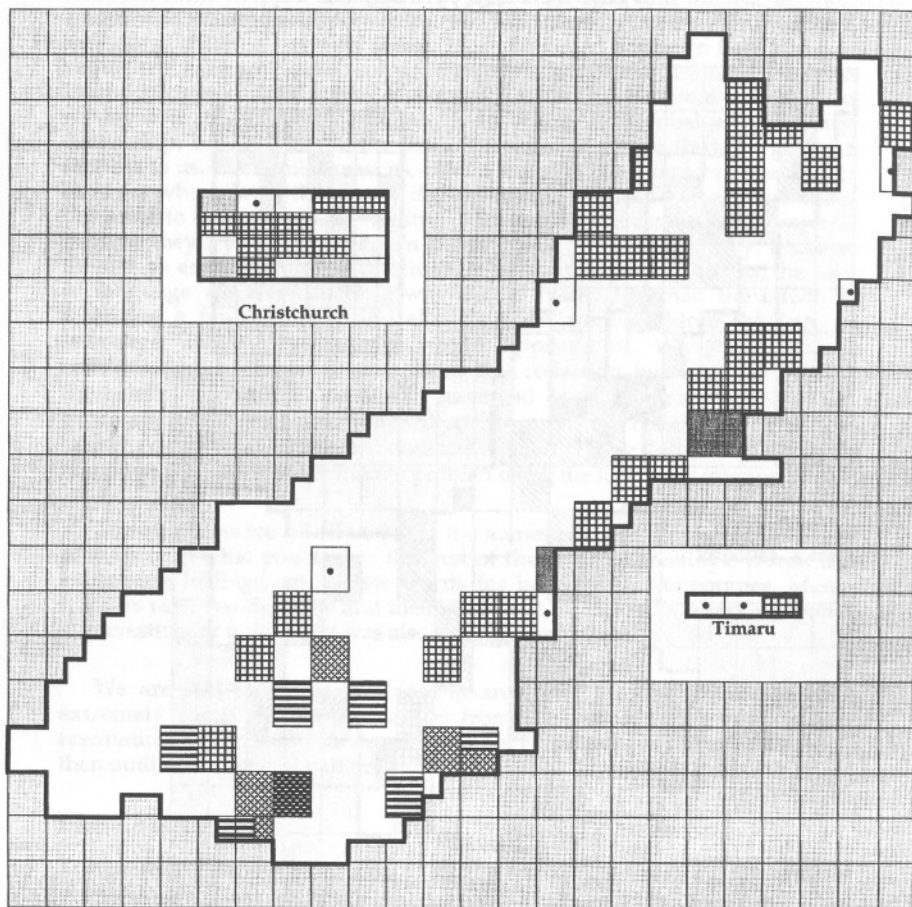## The Chasing Game

The question was:

> At your school, do children play a game with many players where one player has to run and try to touch another player while all the other players try to run away and not get touched?
> What is this game usually called at your school?

Map 1 shows the distribution of the three basic answers. (Urban areas have insets only where sufficient schools participated to necessitate this. Otherwise, their results are shown on the main map, e.g. Hamilton. In some cases, the responses mapped in these insets include those from a small town in the same box as the main urban area, as this was the most practical solution to the problem of displaying results from multiple schools located in one box.)

The answers divide NZ into three areas. In the north, the game is usually called *tiggy*. In the central area (north and south of Cook Strait), the game is called *tag*. In Southland and Otago, it is generally called *tig*.

Map 1: Tiggy, Tag, or Tig

Map 1: Tiggy, Tag or Tig

Christchurch

Timaru

Key

Note that the insets are not to scale, nor all on the same scale for practical reasons. Each box represents one school in both urban and rural areas.

Tiggy	Tig	See urban map insert
Tag	Tig and Tag	No relevant data
Tiggy and Tag	Tiggy, Tag and Tig	

We are still trying to piece together the history of these terms. The *OED* says that the origin of *tag* is uncertain, but possibly a variant of *tig. Tig* is compared to *tick*, which is defined similarly to *tig*. However, the earliest *OED* citation for *tig* is 1816, but the earliest citation for *tag* is 1738. It appears that *tig* was the norm in both England and Scotland at the time the early settlers came to NZ (see e.g. Gomme 1894, 293). If they brought a term with them, it would have been *tig. The New OED* says that *tig* is chiefly British. *Tag* is the standard in North America, see *Webster's Dictionary*, which defines *tag* with a description of the game, but defines *tig* as 'the game of tag', and there is no evidence that *tig* was ever the norm there. (Compare this with *Chambers Dictionary*, which defines *tig* with a description of the game, and defines *tag* as 'the children's game of tig'.) From *The Macquarie Dictionary*, 3rd edn. we can glean the information that, of these terms, only *tag* is in use in Australia, but it seems that *chasings* and *chasey* are the norm there. Sutton-Smith, who studied the history of children's games in New Zealand from the times of the early settlers to 1950, records both *tig* and *tag*, from various parts of the country (Sutton-Smith 1981, 50-53, 253). *Tiggy* appears to be a NZ innovation, although the game Tiggy Touchwood, its suggested origin, (or Ticky Touchwood) is recorded in Britain (Gomme 1894, 292). It is, however, possible that it is the common NZ diminutive with *–ie/-y* based on the colonial form *tig*. The entry in Orsman's *A Dictionary of New Zealand English* for *tiggy*, gives the earliest citation from 1953. It thus seems fairly clear that *tiggy* is new, and local, but the history of *tig* and *tag* is much less clear. There was a period in NZ, at least in the 1940s and 1950s, where *chasing* or *chasey* were widespread terms (this is based on various oral accounts provided by colleagues and their families) in the North Island. Whether they were ever the norm in Southland-Otago is an unresolved question at this point. The question of when and how *tag* got here is also at present unanswered.

Our best guess at this point is that original *tig* was replaced in the central area by *tag*, possibly after a period where *chasing* or *chasey* had supplanted *tig*, and that this isolated *tig* in the north from *tig* in the south, and that this was followed by the development of the diminutive *tiggy* in the north.

Truce Terms

Truce terms are used to claim temporary immunity from some penalty when playing certain games. We asked the question in relation to the basic chasing game:

> Is there a word which you can say to show that you are not playing for a short time, for instance because you need to tie up your shoelace?

There were lots of different answers to this question, including expressions which don't count as 'authentic' truce terms, like *hang on*, which are not special words for this purpose only. There is nothing in the basic meaning of an authentic truce term to suggest that it could be used in this way (e.g. *barley* is basically the name of a grain, and it cannot be predicted from this that it is also used in Britain as a truce term).

Map 2: Localised Truce Terms
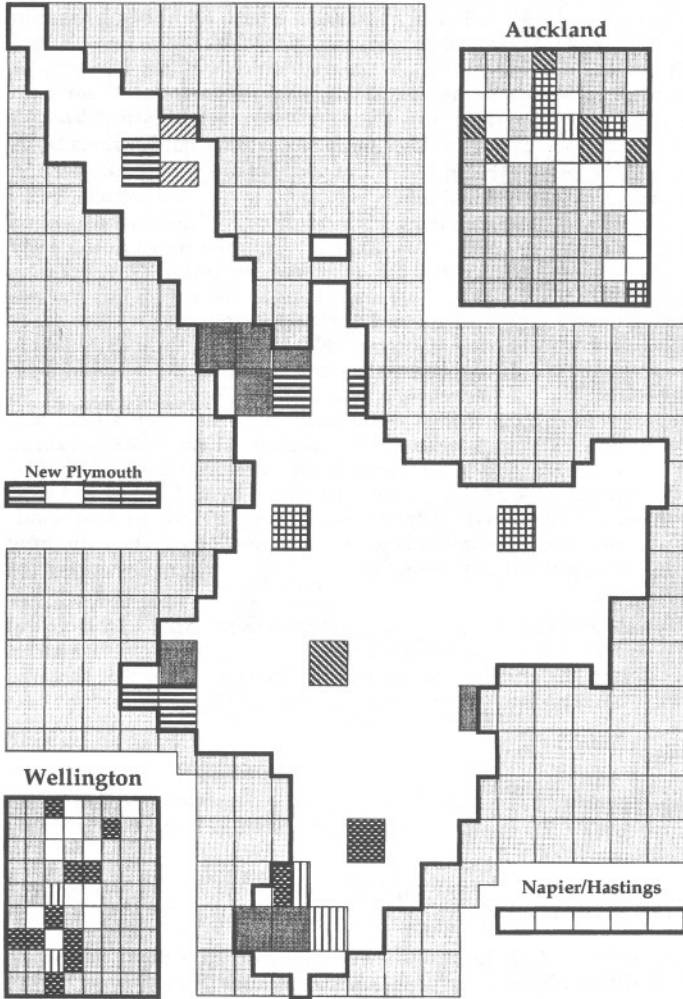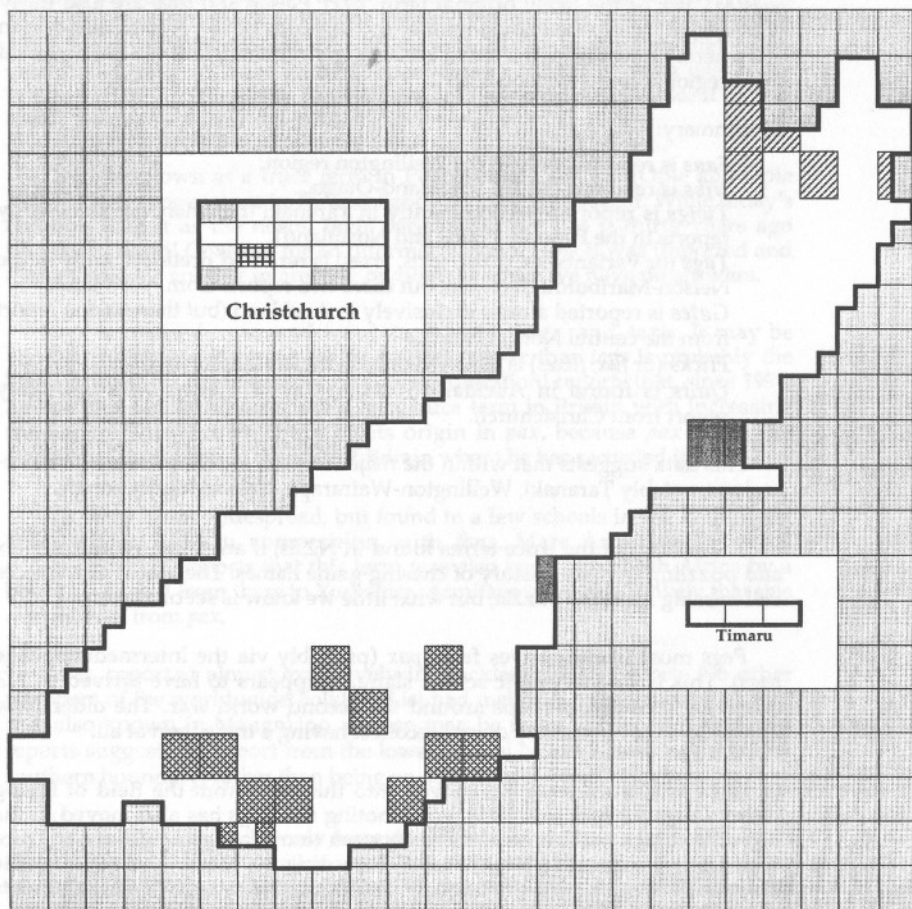
Christchurch

Timaru

Key

Note that the insets are not to scale, nor all on the same scale for practical reasons. Each box represents one school in both urban and rural areas. In insets where one school reported two of the mapped terms, one of the shadings was from necessity recorded in the nearest unshaded box.

fans	gates	quits(ies)	
twigs	tags	See urban map insert	
nibs	flicks		

The commonest truce term in NZ is *pegs* (or one of the variants *pegsed*, *pags(ed)*, *pex* or the likely original term, *pax*). *Poison* and *bags* are also fairly widespread, and *poison* is commoner in the north of the North Island than elsewhere. However, some terms are strongly regional, and we have plotted these regional terms only on Map 2.

In summary:

Fans is reported only in the Wellington region.

Nibs is reported only in Southland-Otago.

Twigs is reported predominantly in Taranaki (but there are some stray reports in the Hauraki Plains and Northland).

Tags (or variants *tax, taxed, taxis, taxes*) is reported predominantly in the Nelson-Marlborough region, but there two reports from Northland.

Gates is reported almost exclusively in Auckland (but there is one report from the central North Island).

Flicks (or *flix, flixes*) is reported only in the Wellington region.

Quits is found in Auckland-Waikato-Bay of Plenty, with one stray report from Christchurch.

This data suggests that within the major regions in NZ, there may be sub-regions, notably Taranaki, Wellington-Wairarapa, Nelson-Marlborough.

The history of the truce terms found in NZ is, if anything, more complex and puzzling than the history of chasing-game names. There are many pieces still missing from the puzzle, but what little we know is set out here.

Pegs most likely derives from *pax* (probably via the intermediate stage *pags*). This is British public school slang. It appears to have arrived in NZ relatively recently, perhaps around the second world war. The older New Zealanders we have asked do not recollect having a truce term at all.

Bags as a truce term has moved into this field from the field of laying claim: *I bags the back seat*. (It is worth noting that *pegs* has also moved in the opposite direction. This movement between terms for laying claim and truce terms is also recorded in Britain, according to Marc Armitage of the Playpeople Project, Hull (personal communication); the two environments share the sense of 'safe/saved'.)

Nibs seems most likely to be derived from *nix*, another piece of British public school slang. Because it is so strongly regionalised to Southland-Otago, we have searched for a Scottish connection, but there is no evidence to support this. The only other record we have of this truce term comes again from Marc Armitage, (personal communication) who recorded the use of *nix* or *nigs* in South Africa from a boy who grew up there, but moved to Britain. *Nigs* provides the expected intermediate step between *nix* and *nibs*. From colleagues we have learned that *nibs* was known in Southland-Otago at least as early as the 1940s, but *pax* was also known in the area at that time. *Nibs* was also known in the Wairarapa at that time.

Fans derives from *fains* (a contraction of *fainites*), a truce term used in the south of Britain (for a detailed account of its location, see Opie and Opie 1959, 151). It can be traced back to Middle English. It is used by Sutton-Smith (1961, 58) in his story of Wellington schoolboys probably set in the immediate post-war period, and we have an oral report from a colleague of its use in the Wellington area in the 1940s, but we have not (yet) been able to trace it further back.

Twigs is known as a truce term in Penrith and Cumbria (Opie and Opie 1959, 153). Its appearance in Taranaki appears to be very recent. While today's children take it as the norm, their parents did not use it thirty years ago (thanks to Averil Coxhead for an informal survey). How it was imported and disseminated is another interesting question to which we have no answers.

Tags is realised in several ways: *tags, taxed, taxes,* and *taxis*. It may be another derivative of *pax*, in which case *tax*, rather than *tags* is probably the basic form. Marc Armitage (personal communication) reports that, since 1994, he has met *tax, taxed, taxes, tax it* as a truce term in Britain with increasing frequency. This throws doubt on its origin in *pax*, because *pax* is not the traditional truce term in the area of Britain where he has recorded it.

Flix/flicks is not widespread, but found in a few schools in the Wellington area, where it is in competition with *fans*. Marc Armitage (personal communication) reports that this term was also known in South Africa by a boy who moved from there to Yorkshire. Armitage considers it likely that this also derives from *pax*.

Gates, reported almost exclusively in Auckland, is a mystery. No other members of the world-wide Folklore List had met it. A colleague reports that it is also known in Mangakino, and so may be more widespread than our reports suggest: the report from the lower central North Island may mark its southern boundary, rather than being an outlier, as the map suggests.

Quits(ies) was reported only from Auckland and the areas immediately to the south of Auckland: Waikato and Bay of Plenty. This may be an import from the US TV show *Dumb and Dumber* currently screening in NZ, but it is also known in Britain (Opie and Opie, 1959, 152). The Opies do not regard it as an 'authentic' truce term.

An Overview

Not all the data we have analysed to date divides NZ into precisely the same areas, but many sets of data suggest that a three-region division is the best hypothesis about dialect areas on the basis of children's vocabulary. There is a northern region extending as far south as the volcanic plateau, and often including Taranaki. There is a central region from Hawkes Bay through the southern North Island (and sometimes including Taranaki) and including all the northern areas of the South Island to south of Timaru, and usually including the Lake District resorts (Queenstown, Wanaka). The southern region, while we call it Southland-Otago, does not coincide with those

geographical areas, since some of central Otago appears to belong to the central region linguistically — it is typically east Otago and Southland which show the southern features.

There is in some sets of data a North Island – South Island division, (e.g. in the names used for the basic Creeping Up game), but there is more evidence for the tri-partite division than an island-based division. There are also significantly more sets of data which support the distinctness of the northern region than there are sets which support the distinctness of the southern region, which often shares features with the central region.

This hypothesis is interesting for many reasons. Cook Strait, surprisingly, does not seem to act as a major linguistic barrier. However, the divide between the northern and central areas of our hypothesis coincides roughly with the divide between eastern and western dialects of Maori (see e.g. Biggs 1961, 2), suggesting that the North Island ranges are a major physical and linguistic barrier, despite modern communications and transport.

Clearly the case for three major dialect regions cannot be made on the basis of this small section of children's vocabulary alone. It is not clear how the areas we have identified correspond to areas marked by variation in other linguistic features (e.g. Southland *r*; the use of *crib*). However, it has enabled us to set up an interesting hypothesis, which can then be the basis for further investigation of other linguistic features.

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Oral Sources

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of many colleagues, friends and their families in adding a little historical depth to our findings.