

The Prosody of Māori 'ko'

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Introduction

When speaking any language, it is important to mark the **information structure** of each utterance, or what parts of the utterance relate to what was said before, and what is the important new information.

In te reo Māori, it is common to emphasise one part of the utterance (one constituent) by placing it at the beginning of the sentence.

However, anecdotal evidence suggests younger te reo speakers are more influenced by English information structure marking, which uses stress more without changing the word order.



One common way to emphasise information is to front with 'ko'.

However, the 'ko' marked constituent can be emphasised because it is **TOPIC**, or **FOCUS**...

What is Topic and Focus?

Topic

Is something already under discussion. The speaker and the hearer share the information.

- a. Ko rātou kei te rongo mai i te haunga ika.
(They could smell a fishy smell)

The speaker mentioned who 'they' are in the previous discourse. So this 'ko' marks TOPIC.

Focus

Is new information and/or it carries the discourse forward.

- b. Ko tō mana kei roto kē i te reo Māori.
(your mana is found within your Māori language)

The speaker talks about Māori language previously but 'your mana' is new.

It is claimed these two functions are distinguished prosodically

The position of the main stress shows the function (Bauer 1991):

Topic: NOT within the ko-phrase ↔ **Focus:** within the ko-phrase



This hasn't been looked at using modern prosodic analysis, and we don't know if this is still true for younger speakers. This is what the project aimed to find out.

Reference

- Bauer, Winifred, 1991. Maori ko again. *Te Reo* 34:3-14.
- Boersma, Paul & David Weenink, 2011. *The Praat program*. Available from <http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>
- King, Jeanette, Margaret Maclagan, Ray Harlow, Peter Keegan and Catherin Watson, 2010. The MAONZE corpus: Establishing a corpus of Maori speech. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics* 16(2):1-16.

Methods

A quantitative approach using corpus-based evidence:

We used the Māori and New Zealand English (**MAONZE**) corpus which contains the recordings of Māori speakers spanning over 100 years (King et al. 2010).

- Last year { Step 1: Extracted all 'ko' sentences from two groups: male elders & younger speakers
Step 2: Categorised 'ko' functions

Table: Summary of data in study

	Present day male elders (Group K)	Present day young males (Group Y)
No. of recordings	10 *	10
Year of birth	1925-1938	1969-1984
Age at recording	64-79	21-35
The number of 'ko' sentences	798	884
FOCUS or TOPIC 'ko' functions	149 (19%)	179 (20%)

*We used only 9 Group K recordings due to poor sound quality in one of the recordings

Step 3: TOPIC or FOCUS labelling

Glosses and translations for 'ko' sentences with the surrounding context were added to judge Topic or Focus function.

Step 4: Prosodic labelling

We used *Praat* speech analysis software (Boersma & Weenink 2011) to analyse the prosodic structure. We identified:

- Pitch accents : associated with lexical stress } High (H)
- Phrase boundaries: associated with ends of phrases } or Low (L)

Results & Conclusion

From a preliminary analysis of the prosodic differences between Topic and Focus 'ko' for Group K, three main patterns emerged:

Fig 1: **Pattern 1 FOCUS** – The main stress falls in the 'ko' phrase (this has the highest pitch peak, blue line)

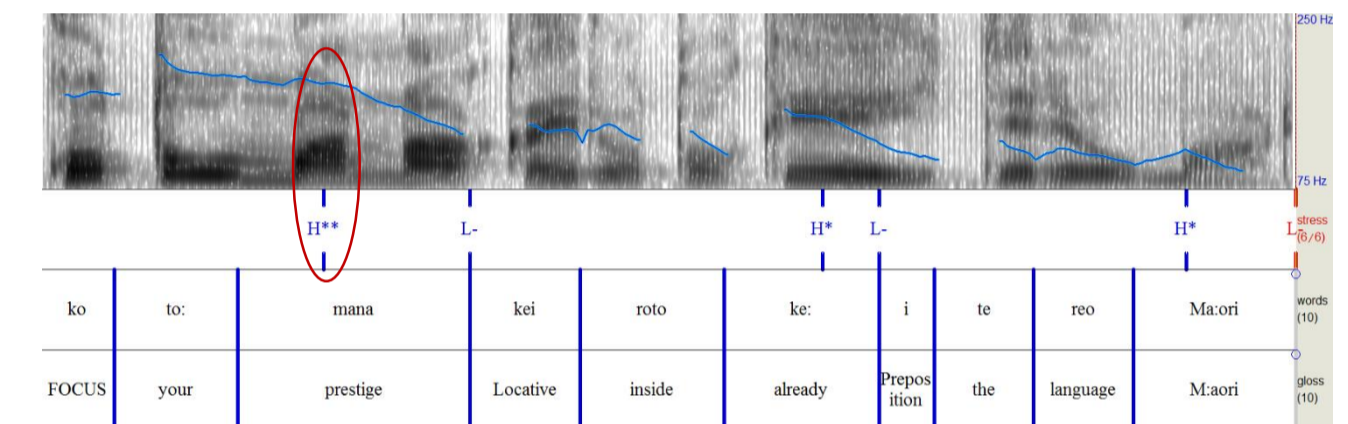


Fig 2: **Pattern 2 TOPIC** – The main stress does not fall in the 'ko' phrase (highest pitch peak in main clause)

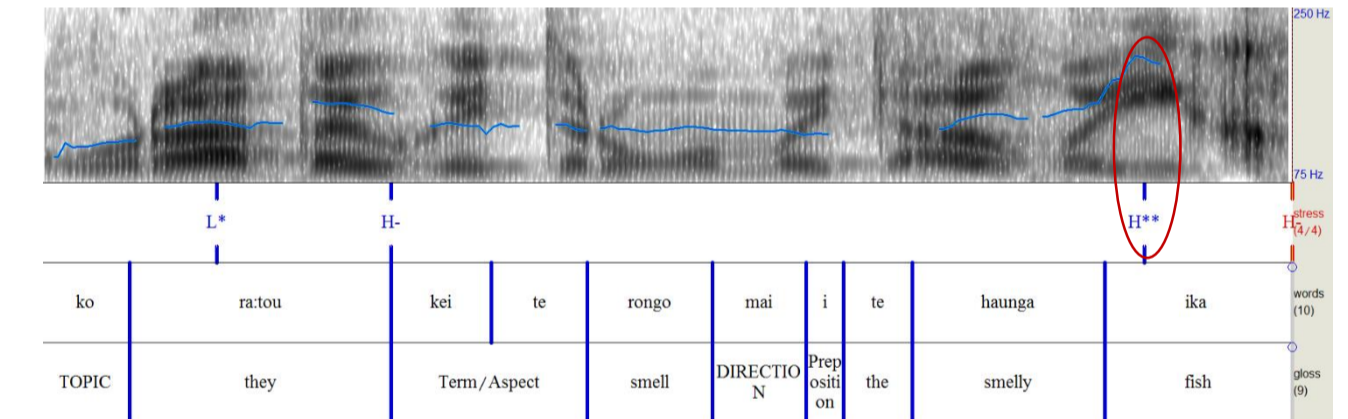
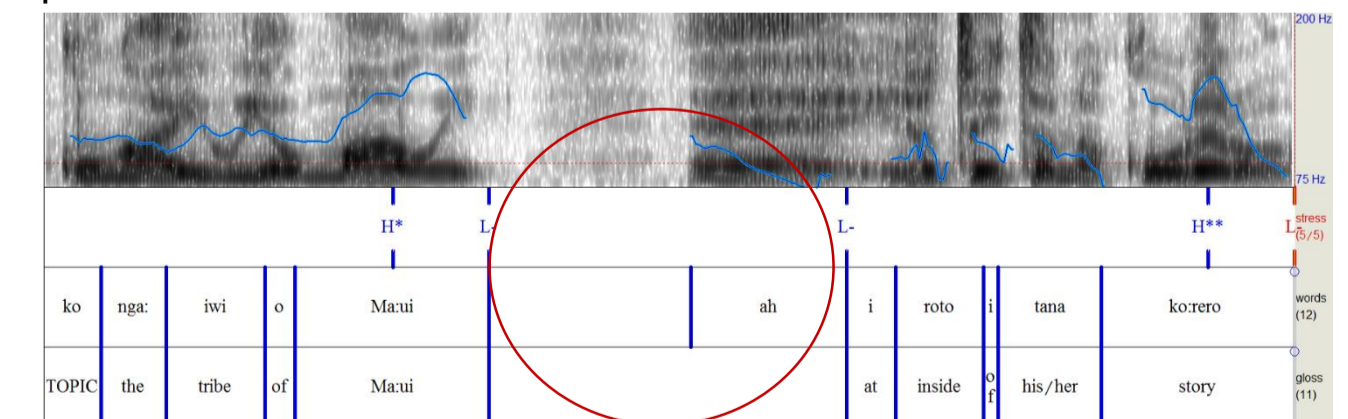


Fig 3: **Pattern 3 TOPIC** – there is a pause between ko-phrase and the rest of the sentence



For Group Y, although it's still under investigation, there looks less likely to be a clear prosodic distinction.

- The results could indicate to us a different usage of 'ko' between two generations
- The results will provide a more detailed explanation than ever before, showing the interactions between syntax, discourse and prosody in Māori 'ko'