

The Increasing Presence of Hypocoristics in New Zealand English

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1. Introduction

Hypocoristics of common nouns, personal names, and place-names, as well as of other parts of speech, are in widespread use in New Zealand English. Known variously as clippies, pet-names, and shortened forms, they tend to be most common in casual speech and informal writing, although they are also increasingly found in classified advertisements, death notices, obituaries, and other newspaper columns, in literature of many types, and in periodicals, such as *North & South*. While many are spontaneous formations, or restricted to particular trades and hobbies, some, such as *subbie* (subcontractor) and *corro* (corrugated iron) have made their way into common use.

Hypocoristics are not easy to define. Most linguists agree that they are best described as alternative forms, pet-names, or diminutive forms with the same semantic content. Crystal (1999:152) defines a hypocoristic as 'a pet name, such as *Willie* or *honey*. Ingenious and bizarre coinages may be encountered ...' Simpson, (2004: 643) researching Australian hypocoristic use, uses the following definition: alternative forms of words or names which share part of the same form, have the same denotation, but have different connotations and different levels of formality. For this paper, I suggest that hypocoristics are alternative forms *usually* sharing part of the same form and denotation, but with different levels of formality and sometimes, therefore, with different connotations. In addition, nicknames such as *The Beehive* which fit Crystal's definition are included. In general, however, New Zealand hypocoristics consist of one syllable from the base form followed by a vowel (-i written 'y' or 'ie' or 'ey', -o written 'o' or 'oh', or -a written '-er' or '-a') or other ending (-s, or -as written '-ers' or '-as'), as in *fishie* (an official), *convo* (conversation), *pav* (pavlova), *doer* (a person who does well), *Dunners* (Dunedin). Occasionally sound changes occur, as in the s-> z alternation found in *possie* ([z]) from position ([s]). Another common form in New Zealand, particularly in geographical place names, is a truncated form preceded by the definite article (as in *The Naki*). Particular corruptions of te reo Maori terms, such as *bungie* (ponga), *claddy* (korari) and *kootie* (kutu), are distinctive New Zealand English hypocoristics. While it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between new coinages and hypocoristics of existing words, in

this paper they are treated together where it is unclear. The purpose of this paper is to provide a general introduction to the usage and to demonstrate the quality and quantity of hypocoristics recorded in New Zealand English.

2. History of usage

Kiesling (2006: 78) suggests that the use of hypocoristics is a feature of Australian English that distinguishes it from New Zealand English, which is clearly not the case. The first recorded use of a New Zealand hypocoristic usage actually preceded any record of hypocoristics in Australian English. *Beacher* (1844) was the name given to a whaler or sailor who 'beached', or set up home (usually with a Maori 'wife') on the New Zealand coast, a term later adopted in the 1860s for gleaners who combed West Coast beaches for gold fragments following storms. The characteristic of using a truncated form preceded by the definite article for geographical names was also an early feature – Hawke's Bay was known as *The Bay* at least as early as the 1870s. The smallest indigenous bird, the rifleman (titipounamu, *Acanthisitta chloris*), was known as the thumb-bird or *thumbie* in the nineteenth century, while the non-indigenous wax-eye (tauhou, *Zosterops lateralis*) was a *twinkie*. The wider use of hypocoristics is also far from recent in New Zealand, the database of more than 1150 items maintained at the New Zealand Dictionary Centre recording numerous usages from the 1800s, including those from particular labour-intensive occupational domains. Such examples include roles within the early freezing industry: *beefy*, *chainie*, *cully*, *guttie*, and *slushy*.

In sharing a similar colonial experience in the rural domain, it is not surprising that some of the earliest terms are shared between Australia and New Zealand. Shepherds, shearers, and sheep-breeders travelled freely across the Tasman in the 1850s and 1860s, although this traffic was in the main limited to the provinces of Canterbury and Victoria/New South Wales. In a comparative study of rural terms recorded in *The Australian National Dictionary* (1988) and *The Dictionary of New Zealand English* (1997) Bardsley found several duplicate hypocoristics. Those that are shared, with earlier citations from Australia, include *bullocky* and *smoko/smoke-o*. Australian farmers adopted the New Zealand terms *placer* (an animal that stays in one location), and *woolly* (an unshorn sheep).

Cases of the same term being used with a different referent were also found. Examples include *roughie/roughy*, used in New Zealand for a wild sheep and in Australia for an unbroken horse; a *bushie* is a rural-dweller in Australia whereas it is a bush or forestry worker in New Zealand. Where New Zealanders use *beefie* for a cattle beast, Australians use *beefier*, but this is not a consistent pattern: while *swagger* was noted by Morris (1898) as a New Zealand term for swagman, and is still the common term, across the Tasman the common term is *swaggie*. Australians shorten *tussock jumper* (*tussy-jumper*) which is left in an un-shortened and semantically

distinctive form in New Zealand. And the same base form may have both endings, thus Morris (1898) has *slusher* as well as the more common *slushy* for a cook's assistant at shearing-time, both with citations in the 1890s. Numerous distinctive examples are found, nevertheless, in New Zealand and Australian rural lexicons.

Hypocorism flourished during World Wars I and II, with both New Zealand and Australian troops generating forms in the tradition of their particular varieties of English. *The Dictionary of New Zealand English* cites, among others, *gypie* (Egyptian), *homer*, (a serious wound that will send a serviceman home), *kriegie* (prisoner of war), and *slittie* (slit trench). This social solidarity function enhancing camaraderie and shared social identity has been carried on since wartime in the naming of schools and school students, and in the familiar names given to members of sports teams, etc. In addition, many of the usages since that time signify technological change and development, an example being *bully* (bulldozer) from the 1940s.

It is since the 1980s that our records show an increasing use of all hypocoristic forms across several semantic domains, as exemplified in the citing of four hypocoristic forms in two daily newspapers in a single day (March 20, 2008): *ex-statey* (state house), *hospo* (hospitality worker), *Rotovegas* (Rotorua), and *the Bay* (Hawke's Bay).

3. Functions of hypocoristics

- The principal function of these forms is in identity provision and the maintenance of relationships with others. Originally, the 'babytalk' form with the -i/-y ending was associated with relations between adults and children, but this has extended into adult relationships with other adults, including terms of endearment. Wierzbicka (1991), in discussing the social solidarity function of hypocoristics in Australian usage, claims that their use suggests not endearment but good humour, and the jocular cynicism, love of informality, and tendency to knock things down to size, which are part of the Australian ethos. To a similar extent, these belong to the New Zealand ethos, and are increasingly evident in the media, e.g., in sports columns. Pejoratives are not common – in general, New Zealand hypocoristics have a euphemistic function, rather than a pejorative effect. The duality of creating a new word and creating the solidarity achieved in sharing a common language is exemplified in the lexis of criminals, which contains a characteristically high hypocoristic content.
- An increased solidarity function is shown in the use of such forms as *Becs* (Rebecca), *Debs* (Deborah), and *Gazza* (Gareth). The ludicity¹ or playful function is shown in such formations.

¹ ludicity – playfulness, from L *ludo*, to play.

- Within organisations and institutions one's identity, position, or status is shown in a hypocoristic form, examples being in initials (*Old JD*), *Aspro* (Assistant or Associate Professor or Principal), or the identity of a specific occupational role such as *forkie* (forklift driver).
- An abbreviation function is most obvious in newspaper headlines, although the abbreviated form is also often used in the body of the news report that follows.
- Finally, hypocoristic forms are used for phonaesthetic or euphemistic effect. Ending in a vowel, or a sibilant sound, they tend to be less harsh in sound, examples being *tummy* for stomach and *blanky* for blanket. Similarly, some rhyming examples, such as *dizzy* or *dizzy Lizzie* (\$20 note) are phonaesthetic.

4. The New Zealand Dictionary Centre database

Data collected at the Dictionary Centre has been categorised according to semantic domain and to form or origin. While much of the data comes from the Centre's lexicographical database of just over 40,000 NZE terms and usages, the more recent data comes from newspapers and periodicals collected since January 2005. Further terms and citations in the Centre's hypocoristics database come from the *Dictionary of New Zealand English*, and terms and citations collected in PhD studies of Dianne Bardsley (2003), Cherie Connor (in prep.), and Diana Looser (2001).

The following semantic domains compiled at the Centre to date are:

- Geographic e.g. *Heke/The heke* (Waiheke Island), *Rags* (Raglan).
- Buildings/venues. e.g. *the Basin* (Basin Reserve), *the Brook* (Carisbrook).
- Trade names and businesses e.g. *Kirks* (Kirkcaldie & Stains), *Vinnies/St Vinnies* (St Vincent de Paul).
- Rural e.g. *bowie* (bowlegged lamb with osteodystrophy), *sweepo* (woolshed broomhand).
- Fishing e.g. *jockey* (Jock Stewart), *kingie* (kingfish).
- Sport e.g. *benchie* (reserve/non-player), *hisser* (a fast tramper).
- Marbles e.g. *glassie* (clear glass marble), *milkie* (opaque marble)

- Crime e.g. *seggie* (a segregated prison inmate) *tinny* (a tin-foil wrapped cannabis).
- Substitute personal names e.g. *Duncs* (Duncan), *Muzza* (Murray)
- General² e.g. *celly* (cell-phone), *chardie* (chardonnay), *compo* (compensation) *cuzzy* (cousin), *unco* (unco-operative/unco-ordinated)

5. Attestations of hypocoristics

The newspaper data, collected from two main metropolitan daily newspapers in three calendar years between January 2005 and December 2007, shows an increasing use of all morphological forms and includes data from death notices, obituaries, and classified advertisements, where it might be thought that expression is more formal and formulaic than that used by columnists, feature writers, and letter-writers. The widespread use of hypocoristics in the general media is not a wholly popular trend:

I am fed up with 'Palmie' for Palmerston North, 'chrissie' for Christmas and 'the heke' for Waiheke Island .. Jim Mora [National Radio host] does not sound like us.³

Hypocoristic place names, and names of national sportspeople and national figures are used widely in newspapers, with hypocoristic forms such as *afters* (post-funeral refreshments), *cuzzy bro*, and *steppie/steppy* (stepmother/stepfather) being found in death notices, along with *streetie* (street inhabitant) in obituaries. *Glassie*, *hospo* and *skiddy* are examples frequently found in Situations Vacant columns. One even finds in the newspaper columns, a city Mayor referring to his city as *Wangas* (Wanganui). Food and lifestyle columns are sources for a range of terms including the *Cab Saws*, the *Chardies*, the *Eggs Benny*, and the *Eggs Florrie*.

This recent data can be compared qualitatively and quantitatively with that from the *Wellington corpus of spoken New Zealand English* (1988-1994), the *Wellington corpus of written New Zealand English* (1986-1990), and the *ICE-NZ corpus* (1990-1996). There is, in fact, a dearth of examples in the corpora, apart from geographical place-names. It is not surprising that hypocorism is under-represented in these particular corpora,

² It is likely that this will be categorized further, particularly as it includes numerous examples from the domains of medicine and food/drink.

³ Letter to the editor, *NZ Listener*, 24.02.2007:4

given that many hypocoristics have their origin or use in particular occupations or contexts, and given the informal and often personal contexts in which they are used. Many are on-the spot coinages, as in 'I'll get a *second-handy*', (a second-hand one), or 'Let's have your *addy*' (address) which are unlikely to make it into print, except occasionally through on-line forums.

Of the 1150+ hypocoristic terms recorded in the *New Zealand Dictionary Centre* database, only 93 were found in the Wellington and ICE-NZ corpora. The most common form of hypocoristic found in the corpora is one syllable followed by *-i*, the most common type being geographical place names (*Palmie* with 16 tokens being the most common). The most common specific location is prefixed by the definite article (*The Beehive*). *Fitzzy* and *Foxy* were the two most common terms for sportsmen, being rugby players of the 1980s, while *Macca* (5 tokens) was the most common example of a substitute name. New Zealand English-specific terms were not well represented in the corpora, the most commonly cited general noun in all three corpora being *varsity*, (118 tokens) a term which has been widely superseded in 2007 by *uni* especially amongst young people. (A broad search in 2007 of Google for *uni* resulted in 249,000 hits, and for *varsity* resulted in 18,100.) Other common terms, none of which are specific to New Zealand English, include *Aussie* (20 tokens), *physio* (17 tokens), *rep* (15 tokens), *pro* (10 tokens) and *munchie* (10 tokens).

Particular types or aspects of mass culture lend themselves to hypocorism and a particular form. *Shortland Street*, the local soap opera, for example, is known as *Landy*, *Shorty*, *Streety*, and *Tantie*.

Terms for religious groups and sects include *benders* (Catholics), *Sallies* (Salvation Army), and *Happyclappies* (charismatic denominations).

6. Hypocoristics of place-names

Significant in the domain of geographical place names is the use of the definite article either in shortened or complete forms, such as *The Mount*, and *The Sounds*. Some forms combine the definite article with the shortened forms such as *The Lewis* (Lewis Pass), *The Naki* (Taranaki), and *The Nua* (Horowhenua). Others are simple abbreviated forms, such as *Kune* for Ohakune, *Lynn* for Grey Lynn, *Papa* for Whakapapa, *Pori* for Porirua, and *Tiki* for Opotiki.

Gleaned from the media, *Cardy Capital*, *Cardy Town*, *Wellies*, *Wello*, *Wellers*, *Welly* and *Wellytown* are all hypocorisms of Wellington while *Hammers*, *Hammytown* and *Hamiltron* are some of forms for the city of Hamilton. Several towns are suffixed with *-town*: *P-town*, (Porirua) *Q-town* (Queenstown) *T-town* (Timaru) *Welly-town* and

Whaka-town (Whakatane). In general, puns are not usual, the best-known possibly being *Taradise* and *Nakiwood* (Taranaki), *Waiberia* (Waiouru), and Wellywood.

Geographical and place names ending in -y or -e include *Cardie/Cardies* (Cardrona), *Gissy* (Gisborne), *Gladdy* (Gladstone), *Nellie* (Nelson), *Palmie* (Palmerston), *Piccy* (Picton), *Queenie* (Queenstown), and *Yaldie* (Yaldhurst). Examples of abbreviated hypocoristic forms from te reo Maori include *Heke* (Waiheke), *Hoki* (Hokitika), *Kati* (Katikati), *Kohi* (Kohimarama), and *Kune* (Ohakune).

Ashvegas (Ashburton) and *Rotovegas* (Rotorua) relate to the ribbon development of the towns and its accommodation, while *Te Texas* (Te Teko) connotes the 'rural frontier' aspects of the town. While no hypocoristics have been recorded in the Wellington database for The Hutt, or the (Lower or Upper) Hutt Valleys, there are citations for *Hutties*, who are residents there. Residents of Carterton are termed *Cartertonics*, *Grey Lynners* are from Grey Lynn, while those from Ashburton (*Ashvegas*) are known as *Ashvegans*.

7. Forms and distribution

The overwhelming majority of hypocoristic forms involve nouns. While these forms have traditionally been used for concrete nouns, abstract forms are now included, examples being *flattie* (flat spin), *foggy* (a foggiest idea) and *hissy* (hissy fit).

Nouns are frequently created from verbs, particularly with the suffixes -i, ie or y, and -er. These include *blowie* (cow blown with bloat), *clipper* (sheep ready for shearing), and *hisser* (a fast runner or tramper). Noun forms created from adjectives include *hairy* (a wild goat) and *heavy* (a serious consequence).

Sibilance is demonstrated in personal names such as *Ants* (Anthony), *Bazza*, (Barry), and *Shazza*, (Sharon) together with the -ers, -as, or -s endings in place names like *Auks* (Auckland), *Dunners* (Dunedin), *Feathers* (Featherston), and *Remmers* (Remuera). There are occasional usages where -s is added to the hypocoristic ending -o, demonstrated in *Waynos/Waynoes*, and *shameos*.

Acronyms are occasionally found in hypocorism in New Zealand, *Eggs* (Epsom Girls' Grammar School) and *Stac* (St Andrew's College) being examples from the schools domain. *Winz* (Work and Income New Zealand) and *Doc* (Department of Conservation) are among government departments. *Soob*, the acronym for small owner operated brothel, is a term generated with the legalisation of prostitution in New Zealand. *P* is a term confined to New Zealand usage and the most common of the terms for the illegal drug methamphetamine, while the double abbreviation *clan lab* is used widely in New Zealand.

While adjectival and verb forms are infrequently used, more familiar examples include *blokey*, *bolshie*, *bosker* (fine), *buttie* (fat) *churchie*, and *dicky*, (dimwitted, from 'dick'). *Tracky* pants and *trackies* are both forms of trackpants. Verbs include *bungie* (to move quickly) and *scarpo* (to escape).

Slang terms are often shortened, an example being *pissy* for 'piss poor', as in: 'I woke up on the couch in my clothes with only a pissy blanket over me and my socks still on my feet'. Glad rags are shortened to *glads* and *gladdies*. At the same time, baby-talk expressions like *blanky* have become common in the conversation of adults, particularly with connotations of comfort, found in 'Alice Taylor describes it [bottling/preserving] as comforting, like a little blanky'⁴. Reduplications, such as *woolly-pullies* (woolly pullovers) are commonly cited.

Polysyllabic names for diseases are frequently shortened, examples such as *dermo* (dermatitis), *lepto* (leptospirosis), *sypho* (syphilis), *TB* (tuberculosis) and *pleura* or *pleuro* (contagious bovin pleuro-pneumonia) having had historical usage. Similarly, drugs such as benzodiazepine (*Benzo*), Halcyon (*Halcie*), Haloperidol (*Halo*), Mogadon (*Mogie/Moggie*), and Rohypnol (*Rolie*) are known in shortened form both within and outside of medicine.

A trend in place names and common nouns has been the affixing of the French definite article as in *La Central* (Central Hotel), *la treat*, *Les Glads* (glad rags), and occasionally, *les movies*. Similarly the suffix *du jour* is used, as in 'the [political] party du jour'.

New Zealand hypocoristics are frequently polysemous. A familiar example is *pressie/prezzie*. *Pressie* is the form used for a member of a President's rugby team (a team composed of players over a certain age, usually 35 years), along with the more widely used gift (present), and Presbyterian. *Scarfy* is a term for a university student (originally an Otago student) in addition to a member of the Exclusive Brethren sect.⁵

Several forms are associated with compounds and collocations, with the example of *westie* (West Aucklander): *Westie chic*, *westie chick*, *westieism/westyism*, *westiemobile*, *westieness*. Some compound forms have two hypocoristic endings: *walkie-chalkie* (parking warden who marks tyres with chalk) and *undie-5-hundie* (a 500 m sprint street race in underwear).

⁴ *Dominion Post Indulgence* 4 August 2007:5

⁵ *Cashie* has four uses, in addition to a plural form (car salesman, cashier, cash converter, a person who cash tax-free; *cashies* small change). Similarly, *flatties* can be flat bottomed boats, flatmates, flat tyres, confusion (a flat spin), a low-heeled shoe, and a flat-headed nail. *Auntie* is used for a mentor, an old ewe, and for an effeminate male. *Roadie* has several applications and the *Dictionary of New Zealand English* lists several uses for *bluey* from different historic and contemporary semantic fields.

Blended forms include *scobie*⁶ and several examples representing Auckland and Auckland life: *Jafadom, Jafaland, Jafanese*.

At the same time, multiple alternative hypocoristics are a feature of New Zealand usage, an example being Shortland Street, cited earlier. Corrugated iron is presented in the building trade as *corrie, corro* and *corru*. A *freshy* in New Zealand is a new immigrant (Fresh Off the Boat) or a fresh snowfall (skiing and snowboarding lexis). This extends to personal names, the famed Daniel Carter being known as *DC* and *Dezzy*.

An illustration of the range of forms and endings is shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3. With limited variety, the dominant form in the semantic domains listed and in common nouns is overwhelmingly the *i/y* suffix. In proper nouns, however, the use of the definite article in geographical place names and names of specific institutions and locations/venues is prominent.

Table 1: Semantic domains of hypocoristics according to endings

Domain	One or more syllables plus -i/y	One or more syllables plus -o, or -os	One or more syllables plus -s	One or more syllables plus -a, -er, or -as	Other, including truncated form
Rural (N=94)	70	3	0	17	4
Crime (N=108)	94	9	0	3	2
Fishing (N=40)	39	0	0	1	0
Sport (N=44)	39	0	1	1	3
Occupational roles (N=110)	81	9	0	13	7
Marbles (N=56)	45	0	2	3	6

⁶ A probationary prison officer; a blend of screw and probie (junior or probationary gang member).

Table 2: Hypocoristics of proper nouns according to endings

Type	One or more syllables plus -i	One or more syllables plus -o	One or more syllables plus -s or -as	One or more syllables plus -a or -er	Other, including truncated form	Use of the definite article
Geographical placenames (N=104)	22	3	9	0	37	33
Personal names (N=26)	10	4	4	4	4	0
Institutions & specific locations (N=39)	4	1	7	0	5	22
Sportspeople and celebrities (N=36)	14	2	7	0	12	1

Table 3: Hypocoristics of general common nouns, according to endings

Type	One or more syllables plus -i	One or more syllables plus -o	One or more syllables plus -s or -as	One or more syllables plus -a or -er	Other, including truncated form	Use of the definite article
N=543	412	46	11	37	37	0

8. Conclusion

In the need to generate new terms to describe objects, places, people, and events, New Zealand English speakers have adopted the strategy of using existing words by adding endings to a base which is almost always monosyllabic, by adding definite articles to shortened forms, and introducing what Crystal describes as ingenious and

bizarre coinages. There is considerable scope in this area for comparative studies of commercial radio and newspaper corpora and of regional differences, and for systematic studies of workplaces and interest, age, or hobby groups. The use of sources such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter would also be worthy of study.

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