

Pasifika English in New Zealand

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New Zealand has some 250,000 people whose families immigrated from the South Pacific islands, making up 7 percent of the New Zealand population. The majority of these people come from four main islands or groups: Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga and Niue.

The first generation immigrants are second language speakers of English, with their first languages being the Polynesian language of their country of origin. New Zealand born members of the community are often dominant in English rather than their community language. This leads to a complex situation of language contact which seems to be resulting in the emergence of a Pasifika New Zealand English (PasNZE) ethnolect in the younger members of these communities.

Interviews were conducted in English with a sample of 30 younger Pasifika New Zealanders from four language backgrounds – Samoan, Cook Islands Maori, Tongan and Niuean. We present findings on four consonant variables which may distinguish their variety of speech from that of mainstream New Zealand English:

- * stopping of (DH) - *these, their*
- * fronting of (TH) - *something, thanks*
- * non-use of linking /r/ - *share of, stare at*
- * use of non-prevocalic /r/ after the NURSE vowel – *girl, shirt*

Our previous study of Pasifika characters in the animated comedy *bro'Town* indicates that these operate as variables in PasNZE. Some are also found in Maori English, leading us to the interpretation that substrate effects from Polynesian languages are likely to be operating. For example, the /dh/ and /th/ fricative pronunciations do not occur in Polynesian languages. The non-use of linking /r/ may be related to the metrical structure of the variety, which appears to be more syllable-timed than mainstream NZE. The occurrence of partial rhoticity, however, cannot be described as being caused by transference from the Polynesian languages. We examine other potential origins of this feature.

Our interview data includes a questionnaire about language use and ethnic identity. This enables us to explore our results with reference to each participant's language background.