Global Structures of Common Difference and Minority Empowerment: Transforming Subjectivities and Creating Alliances in an Aotearoa/New Zealand School

(author version)

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Abstract

This article discusses an effect of the emerging “global structures of common difference” on minority group empowerment. Researchers suggest that structures of difference often limit the ways of being. This article introduces more productive effects and shows the possibility of proactively expanding alliances by the use of global structures of common difference. Based on fieldwork done in 1997–1998 at a school in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where indigenous Māori and recent Asian immigrants, both minorities, live in tension, this article illustrates the emergence of a Māori-Asian alliance against mainstream New Zealanders’ insensitivity to minority languages through evocations of global structures of common difference.

Keywords

Aotearoa/New Zealand, education, global structures of common difference, language politics, Māori, transformation of subjectivity

Introduction

People are becoming different in very uniform ways around the world. “Global structures of common difference” are emerging, organizing diversity by celebrating particular kinds
of diversity and allowing us to communicate our differences to each other in ways that are more widely intelligible. This is the main tenet of Richard Wilk’s insightful work (1995). Other researchers also point out an increasing awareness of a globally shared context and frame of reference against which cultural difference becomes accentuated (Hannerz 1996; Robertson 1992). These researchers show how localization is not the opposite of globalization; rather, they are intertwined.

Some researchers argue that the global structures of common difference limit ways of being, especially when oppressed groups seek to be heard on the global stage. For example, Peter Whiteley (2003) discusses how adapting a globally circulating structure of difference limits the ways Hopi language in the United States can be revitalized, because the idea of property rights behind the global discourse of language revitalization is in conflict with the Hopi’s linguistic philosophy. Other researchers suggest that some global structures of common difference are more liberating than others. For example, Michael Kearney (2004) argues that the global structure of common difference in terms of ethnicity is an “antidiscipline” of the global structure of common difference of nation-states. Representing the “collective identity” of those who cross the U.S.-Mexico national border, for example, ethnicity serves as an alternative to a nationalist consciousness circumscribed by space (Kearney 2004). Some argue, however, that, in a national context, the structure of ethnic difference can also limit ways of being by forcing oppressed groups to shape their political claims in accordance with such structures in order to be heard (Clifford 1988; Povinelli 2002).

This article shifts the focus away from how structures of difference limit ways of being and toward the productive effects of the global spread of any structures of
difference, which has been little analyzed. Drawing on cases at a secondary school from my ethnographic fieldwork in Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1997–1998, I argue that evoking global structures of common difference can create unexpected alliances between persons from different backgrounds. This was the case when minority students who once belonged to a bilingual—English and Te Reo (short for Te Reo Māori or Māori language)—unit in a mainstream public school interpellated me to support their cause not as a sympathizer but as a co-victim of disrespect to one’s language. It had a strong impact on my subjectivity because the subject positions they suggested were part of global structures of common difference and were thus intelligible to me (a person who was born and raised in Japan, attending an American university, and doing fieldwork in Aotearoa/New Zealand).

In this article, I draw on Louis Althusser’s (1971) notion of ideology, subject, and interpellation. Althusser views ideologies as systems of representation—concepts, ideas, or images—through which we think about and experience the world. Our behavior and language in turn articulate the systems of representation, thereby registering and materializing ideology. An ideology constitutes us into subjects situated in the system of representation by calling us into being. Althusser uses the term interpellating or hailing: just as the police’s hail of “Hey, you there!” makes a person turn around thinking he/she was the addressee, an ideology transforms an individual into a subject. Indeed, such an individual becomes a subject in a double sense, being subjected to ideology by being interpellated by it, yet also having a sense of acting with free will as a subject who is the author of, and bears responsibility for, his/her actions (Althusser 1971; also see Hall 1985). While Althusser holds that individuals are always already subjects, others argue
that subjects have histories of past interpellations that affect present ones (Morley 1980; P. Smith 1988). The view of subjectivity behind this approach is that it is neither unified nor fixed: instead, it consists of multiple subject positions and is a layered site of conflict and contradiction (Hall 1985). The ex-bilingual students interpellated me into intelligible subject positions to which I had never before been interpellated.

These students’ interpellation pointed to possible Māori-Asian alliances as well as their risks in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where there is tension between indigenous Māori and recent Asian immigrants (people in the field often identified me as “Asian”). The most commonly identified ethnic categories in Aotearoa/New Zealand at the time of my fieldwork were Pākehā (New Zealanders of European origin) (72%), Māori (14.5%), Pacific Island populations (5%), Asians (4%), and other (4.5%) (Statistics New Zealand 1998: 121). While those who are not Pākehā can be all considered “minority groups,” each minority group is differently positioned (Gershon 2001). Māori, the indigenous group, are descendants of the signatory of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, which made Aotearoa/New Zealand a British settler colony. Immigrants from the Pacific Islands arrived as a semi- or unskilled labor force in the post–World War II era (Fleras and Spoonley 1999). The first wave of Asians (Chinese and Indians) arrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and “developed an entrepreneurial niche” (Pearson 1990: 132). The second wave of Asians arrived in the 1990s as wealthy investors (Ip 1998), changing the stereotype: “In the past, when New Zealanders wanted their land to be white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, the Chinese were depicted as heathen, dirty, and immoral aliens. Now many New Zealanders proclaim that their land should be a bicultural, egalitarian and caring social-welfare state. The Chinese are depicted as

Analyzing the creation of a possible Māori-Asian alliance despite general Māori-Asian tensions, I suggest the use of global structures of common difference as a strategy for minority groups to use in creating a network of support from a diverse array of people, even those who usually do not share common interests, for their fight against relations of dominance. I also suggest viewing such alliances as “uneasy alliances” that must be constantly renewed by supportive actions.

This article is part of my wider research on how students act in and on the intersecting structures of difference that schooling processes produce (see Doerr 2004; 2008; in press b). In the following sections I introduce the ethnographic background of this article, describe and analyze three episodes in which ex-bilingual students (here, “bilingual” denotes not a person’s linguistic ability but institutional belonging at school) transformed my subjectivity, and discuss the implications and applications of these episodes.

**Ethnographic Context**

*Monocultural Assimilationism, Multiculturalism, and Biculturalism*

In 1840, indigenous Māori chiefs and the British Crown signed the Treaty of Waitangi, creating a British settler colony in what is now known as Aotearoa/New Zealand. The treaty led to an ambiguous cession of sovereignty on the part of Māori in return for rights and guarantees. However, most of these rights and guarantees were violated by the British Crown, and later, the Pākehā settler government. Assimilationism reigned,
becoming rigorous when many Māori migrated to urban areas to fill the demands of the post–World War II labor market. Immigrants from the Netherlands and Pacific Islands (i.e., Western Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, and Fiji) also filled the demand and faced assimilationism (Fleras and Spoonley 1999; Walker 1990).

In the mid-1970s, “distributive multiculturalism” that recognized minority cultures, especially Māori and various Pacific Island cultures, became official policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It centered on increasing the number of minorities in decision-making positions, as well as requiring separate treatment for members of separate cultures for their group autonomy, equalization of their condition, and reparations for the wrongs of monoculturalism (Sharp 1990).

In the 1980s, however, some Māori argued instead for a biculturalism that recognizes their special status as an indigenous people and a signatory of the Treaty of Waitangi (Dale and Robertson 1997; Walker 1990). Biculturalist demands ranged from what Andrew Sharp (1990) calls “bicultural reformism” (reform of Pākehā institutions to meet Māori concerns without equal sharing in the decision-making process) to “bicultural distributivism” (development of separate Māori institutions based on the idea of Māori sovereignty deriving from the Treaty of Waitangi). An example of the latter is Kaupapa Māori (Māori objectives), a call for Māori control of Māori lives (Bishop 1996; Mead 1997; G. H. Smith 1990).

By 1985, Aotearoa/New Zealand had declared official biculturalism, responding to intensified Māori protests in the 1970s and 1980s regarding breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori rights to wrongly taken lands, racism against Māori, and marginalization of their culture (Sharp 1990; Walker 1990). Various government legislations became
compatible with the “principles” of the Treaty, and the Waitangi Tribunal began hearing grievances of breaches of the Treaty going back to 1840. The Tribunal was established in 1975, but until 1985 heard only contemporary grievances (Fleras and Spoonley 1999; Temm 1990).

The development of biculturalism was closely linked to the revitalization of Te Reo, whose speakers had decreased in number to 25% of the Māori people speaking and/or understanding Te Reo by the late 1970s (Benton as quoted in Mead 1997). The tide changed when Māori communities’ grassroots efforts to revive Te Reo led to the establishment of bilingual programs in state schools in 1977 (Benton 1981) and of Kōhanga Reo (Language Nest), Te Reo–immersion alternative Māori preschools run by Māori communities, in 1981 (Irwin 1990). This also initiated the establishment of a string of Māori-centered schools for the graduates (G. H. Smith 1990; Walker 1990). By 1997, the time of the author’s fieldwork, 60% of Māori over age 16 could speak Te Reo (6.2% with high fluency; 30.6%, medium fluency; and 63.2%, low fluency) (Chrip 1997:36; Statistics New Zealand 1997:159). In 1987, Te Reo became one of the two official languages of Aotearoa/New Zealand, along with English (Temm 1990).

Even though there was a steady movement toward a bicultural nationhood by the late 1990s, Māori culture still remained marginalized. Te Reo was limited to Māori matters (Chrip 1997), and Te Reo speakers encountered hostile reactions from some Pākehā (Kaaretu 1995). In this context, a Māori being a Te Reo speaker was viewed as a political statement in support of Māori cultural revitalization. Belonging to the bilingual unit at a secondary school needs to be understood against this backdrop.

Liberal Pākehā welcomed the biculturalism, and some learned about Māori
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culture (Fleras and Spoonley 1999). However, when Kaupapa Māori advocates began discouraging Pākehā from learning about Māori culture in the mid-1980s, some such Pākehā turned their attention to exploring their own identity, marking themselves as another ethnic group, “Pākehā,” rather than “regular New Zealanders” or transplanted Britons (King 1991; Spoonley 1991). Some conservative Pākehā challenged biculturalism by calling it “separatist” (for analyses of this, see Doerr 2004; Ballara 1986). Some conservative Pākehā even called for multiculturalism as a way to dismantle biculturalism, claiming that biculturalism excludes non-Māori minorities in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Scott 1995). Some researchers viewed such resistance to biculturalism as these Pākehā’s unwillingness to give up their dominance (Ballara 1986; Spoonley 1988).

Many non-Māori minority groups called for multiculturalism for its own sake (Ip and Pang 2005; Loomis 1991). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the difference between multiculturalism and biculturalism was more than the number of cultures involved. David Pearson (1991) describes biculturalism, in the sense of “bicultural distributivism,” as fundamental realignments of state arrangements and nationhood between Māori and Pākehā, with the Treaty of Waitangi as a pivotal focus. In contrast, the type of multiculturalism discussed in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Pearson argues, (1) suggests the integration of minorities into the state, giving them greater access to positions of power within the existing forms of governance, and (2) does not acknowledge Māori’s special status as the indigenous group and the signatory of the Treaty of Waitangi. The current state of Aotearoa/New Zealand is official biculturalism laced with a multiculturalist concept of social equity applied to other minorities.
An important element in this debate is the highly politicized flow of Asian immigrants in the early 1990s, which is related to two recent shifts in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The first was the change of Aotearoa/New Zealand’s international alliances in the 1970s from Great Britain to the United States, Australia, the Pacific Island states, and, later, the Asian states. While it drew a significant labor force from Pacific Island states, it saw Asia as an area for wealth creation through capital flows and investment. For example, the 1986 Business Immigration Policy (BIP), which changed patterns of immigration in Aotearoa/New Zealand by prioritizing the investment proposal over the country of origin in an immigration application, lured wealthy immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan. The 1991 amendments to the Immigration Act introduced a merit-based point system that led to a surge of immigration from Asia. However, the flow of immigrants slowed in the late 1990s due to the Asian economic crisis in 1997–1998 and the 1995 policy amendment that introduced stricter controls over numbers of immigrants (Bedford et al. 2003; Ip and Pang 2005). The second recent transformation of Aotearoa/New Zealand was the deregulation initiated in various arenas in the 1980s, including the encouragement of foreign investment and public schools’ recruitment of fee-paying English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students from Asia (Dale and Robertson 1997; Kelsey 1995).

Some Pākehā, according to Jane Kelsey (1995: 340), felt they were “losing control of their identity, their economy, and their country” (emphasis in original) due to the influx of wealthy immigrants and foreign investment from Asia. However, most foreign investment was in fact sourced from Australia and the United States. In this context, Chinese (and Asian) positions were paradoxical, Ip and Pang (2005) argue: they
were “needed” and “wanted” because their transnational status had potential for “building bridges” with Asia; meanwhile, they continued to be viewed as incompatible with what Aotearoa/New Zealand was as a nation.

The new Asian immigrants’ relationships to Māori were in tension in three ways. First, their presence posed a threat to biculturalism for some Māori, because the Asians’ call for multiculturalism challenged the recognition of Māori’s special status, as described earlier (Pearson 1991; Walker 1996). Official biculturalism produced in turn a threat to Asians, who felt excluded, having no place in the imagining of the bicultural nationhood (Ip 1998). Second, some Māori viewed the BIP as suppressing Māori struggles by swamping them with “outsiders”—i.e., new Asian immigrants—who were not obligated by the Treaty of Waitangi (Walker 1996). This view, I argue, problematically suggests that new Asian immigrants (who become Asian New Zealanders) would have less obligation than new European immigrants (who become Pākehā New Zealanders) to the Treaty of Waitangi (see Bell 2004; Campbell 2005). Third, an anti-Asian-immigration movement emerged, led by a prominent Māori politician. With the party policy of limiting immigration to fewer than 10,000 people per year, the Māori politician Winston Peters claimed that “New Zealand is ours” and brought his party, New Zealand First, into a partnership with the coalition government in the 1996 election. He became the Deputy Prime Minister of Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, his party had lost many of its supporters by 1997 (Bedford 2002). These tensions were apparent at the school where I carried out my fieldwork, which I introduce below.
**Fieldwork at Waikaraka High School**

In 1998, Waikaraka High School (all names are aliases in this article) served 560 Year 7 to Year 13 students (ages 11 to 18) in Waikaraka, a town of 5,580 at the edge of a suburban sprawl. The ethnic breakdown of the student body, according to a 1993 audit report (dated close to the time of my fieldwork), was 64% “Pākehā,” 32% “Māori,” 3% “Asian,” and 1% “Polynesian.”

Waikaraka High School’s bilingual unit was established in 1981. During my fieldwork, the bilingual unit was a semi-independent unit (the head of the department oversaw the day-to-day operation reflecting local Māori communities’ wishes and was accountable to the principal) offering compulsory subject classes for opted Year 7 to 10 students and homeroom meetings for opted Year 7 to 13 students. By creating a Māori-culture-friendly space, the bilingual unit aimed at nurturing self-esteem in Māori students and encouraging them to stay in school longer, at which it succeeded. While covering the mainstream curriculum, bilingual teachers taught from perspectives sympathetic to Māori causes.

Any students, regardless of ancestry, could join the bilingual unit provided they were committed to the unit and had knowledge of Te Reo. In 1997, for Year 10 (one of the groups on which I focused), there were one bilingual and three mainstream classes with 17 bilingual and 72 mainstream students, respectively. For Years 11, 12, and 13, all bilingual students were put into the mainstream4 so that they could learn “skills needed in mainstream society.”

The fee-paying student program for ESL education at Waikaraka High School started in 1992. During my fieldwork, there were five long-term (more than one year)
fee-paying students, three from Korea and two from Japan, and two groups (around twenty students each) of short-term (several weeks) fee-paying students, both from Thailand. In order to break even with the high cost of marketing, facilities, and an ESL teacher’s salary, the principal was pressed to recruit more students, once even traveling to Korea. In 1997, the high school barely broke even.

Throughout this article, for convenience, I categorize students based on their membership in bilingual or mainstream classes at the time of my fieldwork. It does not assume permanency or homogeneity among bilingual or mainstream students. It is worth noting here, however, that mainstream students with some Māori ancestry often described themselves as being Pākehā who have Māori in them, whereas those who are/were in the bilingual unit tended to identify themselves as being Māori, regardless of the amount of Māori ancestry (see Doerr in press b for details). While I call Year 11 students who were/had been in the bilingual unit “ex-bilingual students,” I call mainstream students who identified themselves as Māori but were never in the bilingual unit “Māori mainstream students.”

My main research focus at Waikaraka High School was the effects of the set-up of bilingual and mainstream classes, a structure of difference, on students’ subjectivities and actions. In order to understand the transition processes when the bilingual students joined the mainstream in Year 11, I followed bilingual and mainstream students from Year 10 to Year 11. During my fieldwork from August 1997 to May 1998 (the school year begins in February), I carried out participant observation in a total of 344 sessions of Years 7/8, 9, 10, and 11 classes as well as outside of class. I conducted 219 interviews of Year 9 and 10 students (65 students, 39 of them twice), teachers (35 teachers out of 39), school
administrators\textsuperscript{5} (4 administrators out of 4), and parents (76 parents—or parents of 55 out of 89 Year 10 students).

As is true of any ethnographic research, my research is a product of my unique interactions with people in Waikaraka. At school, I introduced myself as a Ph.D. student at a university in the United States doing fieldwork for my dissertation. However, I occupied ambiguous positions in the classes I observed. Like a student, I sat among students, but I was able to walk around at will during class. Knowledge-wise, I often answered students’ questions about schoolwork, although ultimately they were relegated to the teacher for approval. Authority-wise, I encouraged students to follow school rules but did not choose to exert disciplinary power over students. Thus, although known as a researcher, I acted as a quasi-teacher-aide at Waikaraka High School.

Students and teachers interpellated me in various positions on various occasions. For example, early in the fieldwork, two bilingual students greeted me with the question “How’s racism in the States?” interpellating me as a fellow-victim of racism, catching me by surprise. Likewise, although I observed in both bilingual and mainstream classes, the fact that I visited bilingual classes led many people to see me as researching only Māori culture at school and supporting Māori causes. I suspect that this made some Māori people more vocal in expressing their views on ethnic relations to me, and some Pākehā people less so. The teachers and students also positioned me as part of the new Asian presence in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

*Social Relations and Perceptions at Waikaraka High School*
Most bilingual and mainstream students mixed little at school before Year 11, although some interacted in extracurricular (e.g., sports teams) and community (e.g., Sunday school) activities. However, the bilingual/mainstream division was only one of many among students at school, and it eventually dissolved when the bilingual students joined the mainstream classes in Year 11. There was no noted division between Māori students in the mainstream and other mainstream students.

Bilingual and mainstream students spoke about their views on each other mostly retrospectively, formulating them as past misperceptions. For example, one Year 11 ex-bilingual student told me: “I used to think that the mainstream students are ballheads [skinheads, meaning racists]. Now I think they are all right. Some are ballheads, though.” One Year 11 mainstream student told me that “before [mixing with the bilingual students in Year 11], people told me ‘don’t mess with bilingual students because they’ll bring their friends and they’ll beat you up.’ A lot of my friends were scared of them. But now, I think they are not like that.”

Below I categorize teachers’ views of the bilingual students into four non-mutually-exclusive categories, based on my interviews of 33 mainstream and 6 (ex-)bilingual teachers (there were 37 mainstream and 6 (ex-)bilingual teachers at Waikaraka High School in total). First, 18 mainstream and 5 (ex-)bilingual teachers said that the bilingual students were “difficult to teach,” as they allegedly had little discipline and/or respect for teachers and/or did not follow rules. Some of these teachers said that this was due to their low socioeconomic status and to peer pressure not to work hard. Second, 15 mainstream teachers said that the bilingual students intimidated mainstream students. Third, 8 mainstream and 1 bilingual teachers mentioned the unity among the bilingual
students, who often stand up for each other. Fourth, 4 mainstream teachers said the bilingual students were arrogant, thinking that Māori culture was more important than Pākehā culture.

Regarding fee-paying students from Asia, long-term fee-paying students attended both ESL and regular classes for their age group. Short-term ones focused on “cultural exchange,” displaying their culture at Waikaraka High School and visiting various local tourist spots. In my interviews, 61 of the 76 interviewed parents of Year 10 students approved of the fee-paying student program, mainly because their children were able to learn about other cultures and because Waikaraka High School gained financially. Twenty-one out of the 39 interviewed teachers approved of the program, mainly because it would teach local students different cultures and tolerance toward them. Seven qualified this, saying that in practice students did not mix with, or sometimes did not accept, the fee-paying students. While 5 teachers appreciated the income brought in by the program, 11 resented this aspect. Many teachers and students perceived the fee-paying students as wealthy because of their ability to afford high fees, and also because of the spending behavior of some fee-paying students (e.g., a student bought a new BMW for himself) and media portrayals of newly arrived Asians.

As described above, throughout my fieldwork students and teachers interpellated me. In this article, three cases in which ex-bilingual students positioned me, described below, have been chosen to highlight the use of global structures of common difference in creating and controlling the relationships between me and them.
(Attempted) Interpellations of a Researcher: Three Cases

Laughing at Mispronunciation of a Japanese Name

The first example occurred in one of the first sessions of a mainstream Year 11 mathematics class, in which the previous year’s bilingual students were joining the mainstream class for the first time. Having observed Year 10 classes in the previous year, I was familiar with all but those who were repeating the class for a second time. Taking attendance from a sheet of paper, Anne, a mainstream Pākehā teacher, read aloud students’ names. She mispronounced some Māori names. For instance, she read “Taipari” as “Tay-par-eye” instead of “tah-ih-pah-rih.” Because Te Reo has an open syllable structure (each syllable consists of a consonant and a vowel or just a vowel), English speakers tend to pronounce Te Reo transcriptions according to English’s stress-timed syllable structure, mispronouncing it as a result. Every time Anne mispronounced a name, some ex-bilingual students laughed. Anne hesitated but soon ignored the laughter and went on calling the roll. It was well known at Waikaraka High School that many mainstream teachers mispronounced Te Reo words and that bilingual students often laughed at this.

I have argued elsewhere (Doerr in press a) that, in light of past assimilationism, the recent culturally loaded national debate about whether broadcasters should use Te Reo pronunciation or Anglicized versions of Māori place names (Ballara 1986), and the government’s recommendation that teachers pronounce Māori names correctly so as to be sensitive to Māori culture (Sissons 1993), Anne’s unwitting mispronunciation/Anglicization of Te Reo names suggested a disrespect of Te Reo. In this context, the ex-bilingual students’ laughter (1) challenged Anne’s disrespect to Te
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Reo, (2) challenged Anne’s authority as the holder of knowledge, while revealing a Pākehā-culture bias in Anne’s knowledge, (3) asserted the ex-bilingual students’ authority in Te Reo, and (4) alleviated the intimidation that the ex-bilingual students felt in the mainstream classes. In this article, I analyze what happened after such laughter.

After laughing at Anne’s mispronunciation of Te Reo words, the same ex-bilingual students laughed at Anne’s mispronunciation of my Japanese given name. These students knew the correct pronunciation of my name partly because they knew me and partly because Te Reo and Japanese have similar phonemes and syllable structure. At first I had an ambiguous reaction to this laughter. I felt sympathy for Anne: knowing the historical context described earlier, I understood the ex-bilingual students’ resentment of Anne’s continued Te Reo mispronunciation; however, the mispronunciation of my Japanese name had very different implications, and I felt it did not warrant laughter.

Soon, however, having come to feel that the ex-bilingual students had a point, I did not urge them to stop laughing (as a quasi-teacher-aide, I usually urged students to “behave” in the classroom).

This incident transformed my subjectivity. Until then, it had never occurred to me to laugh at a mispronunciation of my name (I still would not laugh at it myself). My silence was due to the valorized position of English in Japan while I was growing up, which made English accents in pronouncing Japanese words somewhat fashionable (Oishi 1990). It was also due to the secure existence of the Japanese language, which had the full support of a government and a large number of speakers. However, once the ex-bilingual students alerted me to a new meaning of mispronunciations of my name, my subject position of willing ESL learner was overridden by that of victim, like the
Māori, of disrespect to the language I speak. In other words, the students involved me at a very personal level in their language politics: I was no longer simply observing Māori causes; I had personally experienced language hegemony in the same classroom.

The change in my subject position was accompanied by a change in the structure of difference in which Anne and I were placed: from that of a valorized “native” English speaker vs. a willing ESL speaker, to that of a speaker of a dominant language vs. a speaker of a dominated language. The structure of difference in which ex-bilingual students and I were placed also changed, from that of minority students vs. minority sympathizers to that of victims of domination alongside another victim of domination.

This co-victimhood of bilingual students and myself was suggested in other contexts as well. For example, a bilingual teacher asked me to talk to her class about my experience of racism as an ethnic minority in the United States (the talk did not materialize due to a time conflict). A bilingual student whose family I boarded with pointed out that his distant Pākehā relatives were racist to me because they talked to me very slowly, despite my speaking English fluently. He said: “They just saw your [Asian] face and thought you cannot speak English.” I was so used to people speaking to me slowly, English being my second language, that his comment struck me. No mainstream teachers or students brought up the issue of racism to me.

As I became familiar with Māori people positioning me as a co-victim of racism, nothing transformed my subjectivity more dramatically than the ex-bilingual students’ laughing at the teacher’s mispronunciation of my name, which forced me to take sides. The teacher who had established the bilingual unit told me that the bilingual unit had given Māori students self-esteem in their culture and that they had begun to stand up
against the culturally insensitive behavior of others. Also, as I have analyzed in detail elsewhere (Doerr in press b), bilingual students were aware of a colonial past and continuing racism, and their actions were often part of politically conscious acts of resistance toward subtle racism in seemingly “innocent” actions, which usher the strongest consequences (Hill 1995; Ladi Semali quoted in Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997). I understand that these students interpellated me as a co-victim of racism in the course of their conscious act of anti-racism.

While I suspect that my being a quasi-teacher-aide was an important element in the bilingual students’ formation of an alliance with me—i.e., my status was perceived as safeguarding them from being punished for laughing at a teacher—such an alliance indicates the possibility of a Māori-Asian alliance against a Pākehā cultural/linguistic hegemony. In the context of the aforementioned tension between Māori and Asians, this move is significant. However, such an alliance was dictated by ex-bilingual students, as I show next.

*Suggesting the “True” Name of Waikaraka*

On another day in Anne’s class, Tim, one of the ex-bilingual students who had laughed at Anne’s mispronunciation in Te Reo and Japanese, told me that the real name for “Waikaraka” was “Waikoru” (also an alias). I said, “Really? I didn’t know that.” “Yeah,” Tim explained, “all the books said the name is Waikaraka, but Māori used to call the place Waikoru.” This took place as students were solving mathematics questions and I was walking around the desks to see if they had any questions. Other ex-bilingual students were grinning. Seeing the grins, I wondered if I was being fooled and asked
these other students if Tim’s claim was true. They just kept grinning. Some said, “It’s true.” “Okay,” I said, and believed Tim. Mainstream students stayed out of this conversation.

Some time later, Tim repeated that the real name for Waikaraka was Waikoru. I said, “Yeah, I didn’t know that.” Tim looked at other ex-bilingual students and grinned. Other students grinned back. Seeing that interaction, I asked, “Are you pulling my leg? Is it really true?” They just grinned. By this time I was convinced that Tim was teasing me. I later asked a bilingual teacher whether Waikaraka used to be called Waikoru, and the answer was no.

Tim’s action suggested that, regarding Māori culture, an oral tradition carries “truer” information than do written documents. Being originally an oral-only language, Māori elders passed on their knowledge in waiata (song) and whaikōrero (oratory) to the younger ones (Kaaretu 1992). Having attended various meetings at marae (Māori community meeting places), I was aware that some waiata and whaikōrero included information that was never written down, and that not doing so could be a conscious decision, a fact the orator sometimes mentioned. That was why I assumed that Tim had heard the name “Waikoru” from his elders.

I suspect that Tim guessed that I would believe him, and that I would give credence to Māori oral knowledge, even that held by students, over and above information in books—that is, Tim may have sensed my respect for Māori culture’s oral tradition. However, he was playing on that respect. I felt that Tim was telling me to “back off” before I developed my co-victim status into an over-identification as a Māori “wannabe” or an intrusive Māori sympathizer. This resonated with the call of Kaupapa
Māori advocates: sympathetic non-Māori should not learn Māori culture but instead confront mainstream Aotearoa/New Zealand society’s tolerance issues (Tareta Poananga cited in Mannion 1984: 104-105). Because I knew of this alternative subject position that Kaupapa Māori advocates and other minority groups around the world were proposing (Warner 1999), and because of my sense of an alliance with the ex-bilingual students discussed above, I viewed Tim’s teasing as a warning to me not to take up the structure of difference of patronized Māori vs. intrusive Māori enthusiast. In short, while Tim’s action acknowledged my sympathy to Māori causes, it also drew a line to show where I belonged. In the third case, which I introduce below, an ex-bilingual student attempted to draw a line in a different way.

Soliciting Mispronunciation

In a different Year 11 mathematics class at the beginning of the same year, Hone (pronounced hoh-neh), an ex-bilingual student, asked me to read the name of a local sports team, “Puke,” on another student’s t-shirt. Students were solving problems in mathematics, and I was walking between desks to answer their questions. Hone was repeating this class and did not know me from the previous year. Because I happened to know the word and because I knew Te Reo, I read it correctly—“puh-keh”—without even realizing Hone’s intent. Hone then told me, disappointedly, that he had thought I would read it in the English way, “pewk.”

This episode indicated his initial assumption that I did not know and/or respect Te Reo pronunciation. It shows Hone’s acknowledgement of Te Reo’s marginality because he expected certain people in Aotearoa/New Zealand to be ignorant of Te Reo. Who were
these “certain” people, among whom Hone included me? I suggest two groups. The first were Waikaraka High School’s mainstream teachers, who had a reputation for mispronouncing Te Reo words. Also, as he did not seem to know that I used to visit bilingual classes as a researcher/quasi-teacher-aide, and as he had met me in a mainstream class, I suspect that Hone saw me as a mainstream quasi-teacher-aide. The structure of difference evoked was that of mainstream vs. bilingual. Second, his challenge also indicates that he saw me as an outsider. Because “Puke” was a local place name, anyone who had enough local knowledge could read it correctly. The structure of difference alluded to here was that of Waikaraka locals vs. outsiders.

Here, my Asian appearance apparently did not prevent Hone from challenging me, in contrast to how some ex-bilingual students forged an alliance with me discussed previously. Rather, I suspect that my Asian appearance suggested my “outsider” status, which is common in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Ip 1998; Kelsey 1995), as I have mentioned. This reflects how the Asian-Māori alliance is contextual and cannot be readily assumed.

When I read the word “Puke” correctly, my correct pronunciation disappointed Hone as it disagreed with his assumptions about me. My unexpected and apparent mastery of Te Reo pronunciation also posed an intrusion to Hone’s authority over Te Reo. However, there also emerged an unexpected camaraderie between Hone and myself as ones who knew/respected proper Te Reo pronunciations. Hone’s action simultaneously illuminated subject positions that some ex-bilingual students would assume that I occupied (“mainstream” and “outsider”) and let me assert, although not consciously, subject positions that I actually occupied (as a person familiar with Te Reo and
Waikaraka) by pronouncing the word “Puke” correctly. In the context of the tension between Māori and Asian in wider Aotearoa/New Zealand, what Hone did was a politically loaded action attempting to interpellate, and ridicule, an Asian as “mainstream” and “outsider.” Hone’s action made me reflect on my subjectivity, and on how others would see my subjectivity in Aotearoa/New Zealand’s current cultural politics.

Evoking Global Structures of Common Difference for Minority Group Empowerment

In all three episodes described above, the ex-bilingual students’ actions suggested alternative subject positions for me and affected my subjectivity. This impact was possible because, I argue, the suggested subject positions were personally intelligible as constituents of global structures of common difference (although these ex-bilingual students may have had more local-specific structures of difference in mind). For example, in the first episode, the alternative subject position suggested regarding the relationship between Anne and me resonated with the global structure of common difference of dominant vs. dominated language speakers, seen in linguistic human rights (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1995; Whiteley 2003) and language revitalization movements (Fishman 1991). In the second episode, the structure of difference that Tim fought against—that of patronized Māori vs. intrusive Māori enthusiast—resonated as one resisted not only by Kaupapa Māori advocates but also by many minority groups around the world (Warner 1999). In the third episode, the structures of difference Hone assumed between himself and me were homologous to global structures of common difference of
minority language speakers vs. mainstream language speakers (Fishman 1991) and of insider vs. outsider.

The efficacy of global structures of common difference in transforming subjectivities becomes clear when we consider that not all interpellations transformed my subjectivity. For example, when I was taking Te Reo classes outside Waikaraka High School, I learned to introduce myself following the Māori custom, framing my subject positions in landscapes—the mountain and river near one’s birthplace—and in reference to one’s ancestors. This interpellation did not significantly transform my subjectivity because I did not share the structures of difference that link/differentiate people based on landscapes or ancestry.

Occurring in a mainstream classroom in which ex-bilingual students were the minority, the ex-bilingual students’ actions presented a way to draw individuals to their cause to gain respect for Māori culture and language, but in the manner they saw fit. They did this by taking my language as a resource in a way I had never considered, and by resorting to my view of oral tradition. Such actions had a strong emotional impact and caused lasting transformation of subjectivity.

This interpellation suggested that Māori and Asians were allied as speakers of marginalized languages, despite the general tension between the two groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand. At a grassroots level, such an alliance can lead to proactive joint actions fighting to reduce prejudices against minority languages by bringing them to people’s consciousness. Such an alliance can also reach a political level, calling for policies and imagining of an inclusive Aotearoa/New Zealand nationhood. A transformation of subjectivity can also lead to a revelation that one has been an
unintended accomplice in the oppression of certain groups of people. For example, my previous unquestioning acceptance of Anglicization of my Japanese given name supported the hegemonic dominance of English in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context. Such a revelation could encourage one to act differently.

Inspired by the effects of these ex-bilingual students’ actions, I suggest in this article that evoking global structures of common difference can be a strategy by which minority groups forge alliances in support of their cause with people of diverse backgrounds. Suggesting common subject positions, global structures of common difference can transform a person’s subjectivity so that one becomes not a sympathizer with oppressed groups but a person who shares experiences of oppression, as the cases discussed in this article showed.

I also suggest viewing such an alliance as uneasy, primarily because there is a risk that it may develop into an intrusive relationship in which Asians seek to dominate Māori cultural politics, which Kaupapa Māori advocates would resent. I interpret the second episode, in which an ex-bilingual student sought to distance my sympathy toward Māori, to be an act of containing such a risk. It was no coincidence that I was chosen as a target for laughter in the third episode. The awareness of the uneasiness of the alliances allows us to acknowledge that, despite the parties’ intentions to support one another, historical and contemporary situations at various levels also interpellate individuals into subject positions of privilege or marginality. This acknowledgment encourages individuals to constantly and actively re-create links, proactively supporting each other’s causes so as to overcome the constraints of these other subject positions.
There are other risks. First, subject positions may change to support relations of dominance. I have suggested elsewhere (Doerr 2004) that in such a case the conversion should be countered with a suggestion of yet another alternative subject position to support the oppressed group. Second, reactions to the suggested alternative subject positions vary depending on one’s existing subject positions (Morley 1980). Then, attempts to create an alliance need to be followed up and constantly adjusted, as Tim was doing. Third, evoking global structures of common difference should not lead to an imposition of global structures on local politics (see Whiteley 2003). Instead, we should aim at making such alliances a starting point for learning the specificity of local relations of dominance and ways to alleviate them.

As discussed earlier, studies on structures of difference focus on the structures’ limiting effects on one’s subjectivities (Clifford 1988; Povinelli 2002; Whiteley 2003). I have shown in this article that global structures of common difference can spawn new alliances by suggesting intelligible subjectivities that bring together those who never considered being part of such alliances. The force of such alliances lies in their unexpectedness: immigrant Asians and indigenous Māori, who often are at odds, can be brought into alliance.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2003) points out that while much globalization studies, including the argument of the global spread of structures of difference, emphasize the novelty of the phenomena and theoretical frameworks that analyze them, much of globalization research resembles nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social evolutionism and diffusionism: they are both about “the dissemination and recontextualisation of, and resistance to, modernity” (2003: 3). What I have focused on in
this article, however, is how the dissemination created concrete connections among people. Here the connections were made metaphorically, not metonymically (Levi-Strauss 1968), because it was the same position within globally shared homologous structures of difference that connected the ex-bilingual students and myself. Thus, my argument differs from other theories that illustrate connections created by globalization, such as virtual neighborhoods constructed through Internet communication (Appadurai 1996) and global connectivity that allows individuals to feel distant places to be routinely accessible (Tomlinson 1999), which are based on metonymic relations among individuals. Unlike metonymic connections, metaphoric connections can involve transformations of subjectivity as previously unrecognized homologous structures of difference are suddenly brought to attention.

While this article has focused on a specific case of Māori-Asian alliance in the specific historical context of Aotearoa/New Zealand, what I have suggested—that global structures of common difference can be used to connect people from diverse backgrounds—holds true in other contexts thanks to the increasing *global spread* of such structures of common difference.

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References


Although Kearney does not suggest explicitly that ethnicity is a global structure of common difference, he implies it when he compares it to the global structure of common difference of nation-states (Kearney 2004).

Decreased government funding and increased local management due to deregulation policy led many public schools to seek a new source of revenue in ESL education for foreign students. These non-citizen ESL students paid large school fees (e.g., NZ$7,500.00 per year as compared to NZ$75.00 by local students in Waikaraka High School in 1997). The net income from fee-paying students in Aotearoa/New Zealand was NZ$230 million (1% of total foreign exchange earning in Aotearoa/New Zealand) in 1995 (Dale and Robertson 1997). While fee-paying students no longer had to pay high fees once they became citizens of Aotearoa/New Zealand, the new Asian immigrants and fee-paying students from Asia were often lumped together.

However, there were some Māori, such as Sir Paul Reeves who encouraged connecting with Asians in some joint ventures for mutual benefit (Ip and Pang 2005).

They could opt to join the bilingual unit only for morning homeroom meetings.

Because some administrators taught regular classes, I call these administrators “teachers” hereafter for this reason.