

Māori/English form development

Background

Both English and Māori are official languages in New Zealand and Māori/English versions of the New Zealand Census forms have been available to respondents since 1996.

Redevelopment of the Māori/English forms for 2006 repeated the 'dual development' process used in previous years. This method involved a collaborative approach to language development where Māori language developers work alongside English language developers to establish questions that will work equally well in both languages. However, the development context for 2006 constrained the number of revisions made as a 'minimal change' philosophy was the overriding objective for the redevelopment.

For the 2006 development, it was also agreed that Guide Notes would be included at the back of the Māori/English forms.

Development objectives/plan

There were three core objectives in revising the Māori language side of the Māori/English forms for 2006. These were:

- **Understandability:** Developing questions that would be simple and understandable to the widest possible range of Māori language respondents.
- **Conceptual equivalence:** Developing questions that would measure equivalent concepts in both Māori and English to ensure comparability of data.
- **Data consistency:** Upholding a 'minimal change' approach to question revisions to ensure continuity and consistency between censuses would be maintained.

To meet these objectives a comprehensive programme of testing was conducted which included cognitive testing with respondents in both English and Māori, analysis of data from field tests and consultation with key stakeholders,

Cognitive testing

The cognitive testing programme was conducted between April 2003 and May 2005 with respondents of varied age, sex and Māori language proficiency. Forty six tests were undertaken during this period. Interviewers observed respondent form-filling behaviour and asked a series of follow-up questions.

Cognitive testing results

Rounds one, two and three: April and May 2003, June to December 2003 and March to July 2004

The first round of cognitive testing for revisions in the Māori language was conducted 'blind'. In blind testing respondents with Māori language skills worked through questions in Māori without reference to an English language version. Interviewers, skilled in speaking Māori, conducted the testing and weighed respondents' general comprehension against language proficiency to assess how well the questions were working.

Blind testing with 34 respondents nationwide indicated that respondents sometimes struggled with the language on the forms. While generally the wording effectively conveyed the meaning of the corresponding English question, question length and complexity sometimes led to comprehension difficulties. In particular, respondents tended to have difficulty with bureaucratic terminology such as the names of educational qualifications.

Question wording was further refined and redeveloped throughout the testing cycle in order to simplify wording as much as possible.

Round four: November 2004 to May 2005

Respondents in round four used in the Māori/English version of the form. In this round respondents could refer to the English side of the form if necessary. Twelve respondents were selected with a range of proficiency in te reo Māori.

Testing confirmed that some respondents were capable of completing the Māori language side of the forms with little or no assistance, whilst others referred to the English side for translations, as required. Some of the more proficient respondents also suggested that some of the question wording could be simplified to aid readability for respondents with less proficiency in the language. Where possible, these suggestions were incorporated and tested. However, as found in earlier testing rounds, many respondents continued to have difficulty understanding the bureaucratic terminology used within the form. New terminology for 'civil union' status also proved to be a problem for many.

Field test results

Field test: June 2004

Testing was limited for the June test and only a very small number of respondents returned a form that had been completed on the Māori language side. This sample was too small to provide reliable information. Therefore, no results from that testing are presented here.

Dress rehearsal: 8 March 2005

Data analysis from the dress rehearsal indicated that item non-response was generally higher for those using the Māori/English forms. For example, item non-response rates for age was double the rate observed for English-only forms. However, the number of forms completed in Māori language was too small to be representative and therefore no additional analysis was undertaken.

Dress rehearsal follow-up survey: March 2005

Results from the follow-up survey, conducted after the dress rehearsal, suggested that 95 percent of the 83 respondents who had completed Māori/English forms had found it easy to identify which pages needed to be filled in on the Māori/English forms.

Other testing

As well as the testing programme outlined above, forms were also peer reviewed by language experts. This included representatives from Te Taura Whiri and other qualified translators. Recommendations from these reviews were incorporated into the redevelopment and testing programme.

Summary

Overall, the redevelopment of Māori/English forms for 2006 progressed smoothly. Although there continued to be some comprehension difficulties for some respondents, particularly for bureaucratic terms (such as qualification names) and new terminology (such as the te reo equivalent for civil unions), respondents were usually able to complete forms satisfactorily. The side-by-side presentation of the Māori/English forms was an important and successful strategy in allowing respondents to quickly and readily check their comprehension of difficult words.

Future development

To maximise comparability of questions in both English and Māori, and to allow adequate time for cognitive testing and revisions, it is highly recommended that dual development continues to be used for the 2011 development.