

WHEN LANGUAGES COME BACK TO LIFE

COMPARING HEBREW AND MĀORI

Thousands of languages are spoken around the world today, but many are at risk of disappearing. When fewer people speak a language, it can become endangered or even die out completely. Some communities have worked to save their languages through a process called revival. A revival is the process of bringing something back after it has declined. Two important examples of language revival are Hebrew and Māori.

Although Hebrew and Māori have different histories, both languages faced serious challenges. In both cases, people worked to protect their language because it was an important part of their culture and identity.

Hebrew is an ancient language that was spoken by Jewish people thousands of years ago. Over time, Jewish communities spread across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. As they settled in new areas, many began speaking local languages instead of Hebrew. By around the fourth century CE, Hebrew was no longer commonly used in everyday conversations.

However, Hebrew was never completely lost. It continued to be used in religious ceremonies, sacred texts, and education. Jewish people around the world learned to read Hebrew so they could study important writings. Because it remained a language of religion and learning, Hebrew was preserved for many centuries.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Jewish leaders worked to bring Hebrew back as a spoken language. Families began using Hebrew at home, newspapers were written in Hebrew, and schools taught students in Hebrew. As more people learned the language, many became fluent, meaning they could speak, read, and understand it easily. Today, Hebrew is the main language of Israel and is spoken by millions of people.

The story of Māori is different. Māori is the language of the Māori people, the indigenous people of New Zealand. Indigenous people are the original inhabitants of a place before settlers arrive from elsewhere.

For many years, Māori was widely spoken throughout New Zealand. However, after British colonization, English became the dominant language. Many schools encouraged students to speak English, and some children were punished for speaking Māori. As a result, fewer parents taught the language to their children. By the mid-1900s, the number of Māori speakers had dropped significantly.

Welcome in Three Languages

English: Welcome

Hebrew: קַבֵּאלַת פְּנִיִּים (kabealat phanim)

Māori: Nau mai haere mai

To save the language, Māori communities created a revival movement. Schools played an important role in this effort. In the 1980s, Māori-language preschools were created so children could learn the language from fluent speakers. Later, Māori-language schools were established to help a new generation learn and use Māori.

Both Hebrew and Māori faced the challenge of declining numbers of speakers. Community leaders recognized the danger and worked to save their languages. Education was an important part of both revival efforts.

The two revivals were also different. Hebrew had not been widely spoken in daily life for centuries, but it survived through religion and writing. Hebrew revival focused on bringing an old written language back into everyday conversation. Māori was still spoken by some people, but younger generations were not learning it. Māori revival focused on protecting an existing language from disappearing.

The revival of both languages shows the importance of cultural identity, which is a person's sense of belonging to a group that shares traditions, history, and language. For many, saving a language means saving an important part of who they are. Hebrew and Māori demonstrate that with determination and community support, endangered languages can survive and grow.

Vocabulary

1. Define the term: Indigenous

2. Define the term: Cultural Identity

Comprehension Questions

3. What major challenge did both Hebrew and Māori face? Explain why their languages were at risk of disappearing.

4. How was Hebrew preserved, and what efforts helped bring it back as a spoken language?

5. How did Māori revival efforts differ from Hebrew revival efforts? Explain the role schools played in saving Māori.

Critical Thinking

6. Why do you think some communities work hard to preserve their languages? Use evidence from the reading to support your answer.

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary

1. Define the term: Indigenous

Indigenous means the original inhabitants of a place before settlers arrive from elsewhere. In the reading, Māori are described as the indigenous people of New Zealand.

2. Define the term: Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is a person's sense of belonging to a group that shares traditions, history, and language. Language can be an important part of a group's cultural identity.

Comprehension Questions

3. What major challenge did both Hebrew and Māori face? Explain why their languages were at risk of disappearing.

Both Hebrew and Māori faced declining numbers of speakers and the risk of their languages disappearing. Hebrew was no longer commonly spoken in everyday life, and Māori speakers declined as more people began using English instead.

4. How was Hebrew preserved, and what efforts helped bring it back as a spoken language?

Hebrew was preserved through religious ceremonies, sacred texts, and education. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, families began speaking Hebrew at home, newspapers were published in Hebrew, and schools taught students in Hebrew, helping restore it as a spoken language.

5. How did Māori revival efforts differ from Hebrew revival efforts? Explain the role schools played in saving Māori.

Hebrew revival focused on bringing an ancient written language back into everyday conversation after it was no longer commonly spoken. Māori revival focused on protecting an existing language that was losing speakers. Schools helped save Māori by creating Māori-language programs where children could learn and use the language from fluent speakers.

Critical Thinking

6. Why do you think some communities work hard to preserve their languages? Use evidence from the reading to support your answer.

Communities work to preserve languages because languages are connected to culture, history, and identity. The reading explains that Hebrew and Māori communities believed their languages were important parts of who they were, so they created schools and other programs to help future generations learn them.