

**Verbs in Māori: The Problem of Definitional Criteria**

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**Abstract**

A range of different types of criteria has been applied at different points in the history of the classification of verbs in Māori. These have included syntactic and morphological criteria, semantic criteria and derivational criteria. Unfortunately, these criteria have not always been applied consistently and this has led to considerable disagreement about the classification of verbs in Māori. In this paper, different accounts of verb classification in Māori are critically examined and it is argued that some of the disagreements can be resolved by acknowledging (a) that words in Māori may be assigned to different word classes in different contexts, and (b) that word classes and sub-classes should be determined on the basis of morphological and syntactic criteria with semantic and derivational information playing a role only in so far as they have observable syntactic and/or morphological consequences.

**Introduction**

Bauer (1997, p. 65) acknowledges that “[the] analysis of Maori vocabulary into parts of speech or word classes is an area where there is disagreement in the scholarly community”. She attributes this disagreement to the fact that the same word may occur in different syntactic environments:

The division of opinion arises because Maori, like other Polynesian languages, uses the same form of a word in many different syntactic environments. For instance *waiata* [may be] a lexical head in a verb constituent . . . the lexical head in an argument constituent . . . a modifier in an argument constituent . . . and a modifier in a verb constituent (p. 65).

In fact, this phenomenon is by no means confined to Polynesian languages. In English, for example, ‘round’ is an adjective in (1) below, a noun in (2) below, a verb in (3) below, and a preposition in (4) below.

- (1) It was a round object.
- (2) He offered us a round of sandwiches.
- (3) You will round that corner too quickly once too often.
- (4) He went up the hill and round the corner.

The fact that the same lexeme may, depending on the context in which it occurs, be assigned to a different word class does not appear to create any particular difficulties in the context of word class assignment in English. It is difficult, therefore, to appreciate why it should do so in the case of Māori.

Bauer observes that disagreements relating to word class determination can be resolved “for practical purposes” by accepting that “most base forms [in Maori] have the potential to be used in either nominal or verbal constituents” so that “when such forms are used verbally, they co-occur with verbal particles, and can be passivized, and when they are used nominally, they co-occur with determiners” (p. 65). She goes on to state that “the class noun or verb can be treated as a class of uses, rather than a class of forms” (p. 65). In many respects, these comments are self-evidently true. However, there is a sense in which they do not go far enough and a sense in which they go too far. The fact that certain lexemes may function as nouns in some contexts and as verbs in others is fundamental: it is not just something that we need to accept ‘for practical purposes’. It is the way in which a lexeme functions, as revealed by its morphological properties and/or syntactic environment, that determines its assignment to a particular word class. In many languages, the same lexeme can be assigned to more than one word class. There is, therefore, nothing unusual about Māori or other Polynesian languages in this respect. However, acknowledging this is not sufficient to resolve other types of disagreement in relation to word class categorization in Māori. Some of these disagreements relate to the issue of whether Māori has an adjective class. Others relate to the treatment of all closed system items (or items that are more closed system than open class) in Māori as particles. Not all of these issues are addressed fully here because the primary focus of this paper is the classification of verbs in Māori. The discussion here does, however, have implications for other areas of disagreement among grammarians.

### **Word classes in Māori: an introduction**

Underlying the definition of word classes in Māori is the fundamental distinction that is generally made between lexical bases and particles, with nouns and verbs belonging to the former category. However, an examination of the history of word class assignments in Māori reveals that different types of criteria have been used by different analysts in different ways. It may be that some of these disagreements could be resolved by making reference to semantic and derivational information only where such information has observable syntactic and morphological implications, these implications being the critical factor in determining whether a separate category or sub-category should be recognized.

### **The verb class in Māori**

Maunsell (1842) was one of the first grammarians to comment on verbs in Māori. He categorized them into active, passive, and neuter as follows:

The active is the simple root...e.g., *e patu ana ahau*, I am striking. The passive is the root varied in its termination; e.g., *e patua ana ahau*, I am struck. The neuter expresses being, or a state or condition of being; when the agent and the object

acted upon coincide, and the event is properly neither action nor passion, but rather something between both: as *I am, I sleep, I walk* (Maunsell 1842, p. 52).

Maunsell classified those verbs that he saw as being derived from simple adjectives as belonging to the neuter class category. He also recognized a parallel class of verbs, a class that he saw as being passive in meaning but not neuter in form. He classified this class as ‘verbalized adjectives’. What is immediately apparent from Maunsell’s description at this point is that it is based on two different types of criteria. Thus, neuter verbs are verbs that express being (semantic criterion), whereas verbalized adjectives are derived from simple adjectives (derivational criterion). What is important is to determine whether there are differences in terms of morphology or syntax. If there are, there is a strong argument in favour of establishing two different word classes or two different groups belonging to the same word class; if there are not, the argument for doing so is considerably weaker.

Williams (1862) originally classified verbs in Māori into ‘passive’, ‘active’ and ‘participle neuter’ types, defining ‘participles’ as a class of words that “are not regularly derived from verbs, as in European languages, but are of independent origin, though participial in meaning . . . . These are treated as neuter verbs, as also are adjectives, when they do not express the intrinsic or essential quality of a thing” (Williams 1862, p. 56). In this case, it is difficult to determine precisely what criteria are being applied although the emphasis appears, once again, to be on meanings rather than on the morphological and/or syntactic consequences of these meanings.

In a later version of his work, Williams (1910) reverts to the term ‘neuter verb’, stating that these verbs have the same qualities as adjectives. Furthermore, forms such as *ora* have a “notion of becoming, which is peculiarly characteristic of the inceptive, [but which] appears also in some of the other tenses” (Williams 1910, reported in Williams & Williams 1965, p. 49). Of particular significance, is the fact that Williams established a division between neuter verbs and intransitives (verbs occurring without an object).

For a considerable period after the appearance of these works by Maunsell and Williams, little was published on the verb category in Māori apart from what Bauer (1981, p. 13) described as ‘school grammars’. These works were intended mainly for an adult audience and were generally based on Williams’ grammar. Thus, for example, Ngata (1901), in dealing with the verb in Māori, follows roughly the outline provided by Williams. He classified verbs into ‘active’, ‘passive’, and ‘neuter’, as did Kirkham (1917), Smyth (1939), and Harawira (1950). These works add little to our understanding of the classification issues surrounding the verb category in Māori. In contrast to these works, Johansen’s analysis of prepositions (1948) is both detailed and original. Unfortunately, however, its analysis of the verb category is confined to verbal sentences and the prepositions connected with them.

In 1961, Biggs produced a thesis on the structure of New Zealand Māori in which word classes were defined according to distributional criteria, according to their

“occurrence or non-occurrence in certain divisive frames” (Biggs 1961, p. 23). Biggs divided bases into four classes: N-bases, V-bases, A-bases, and G-bases:

- N-bases (nouns) can be juxtaposed to definite articles but are incompatible with pre-verbal particles such as *ka* (inceptive), *e* (general), *i* (past), *kia* (desiderative), *kua* (perfect), *kei* (caveat), *me* (prescriptive), and *he* (indefinite article).
- V-bases can take pre-verbal markers but are incompatible with definite articles (e.g. *ea* ‘required’, *hemo* ‘passed’, and *mahiti* ‘spent’). This class corresponds closely to what Maunsell and Williams refer to as ‘participles’.
- A-bases can occur in sequence with pre-verbal markers and definite articles (e.g. *ka maroke* ‘dry’, *te mate* ‘death’).
- G-bases can occur following the frame: Pre-verbal markers + G-bases + passive suffix. (e.g. *i patu-a* ‘was clubbed’, *i moto-kia* ‘was punched’, and *kua aroha-ina* ‘has been loved’ (Biggs 1961, 25)).

The final class referred to above includes “transitive verbs, and verbs of motion, communication and perception” (Hooper 1984, p. 41). Biggs later combined V- and A-bases into a class named ‘statives’. Thus:

All words are divided into two classes, bases and particles. The particles (and certain affixes) are the grammatical words; they are few in number . . . . All other words are bases. Bases divide into five classes (parts of speech). The class of a base is determined by the constructions into which it can enter. *There are no overlapping classes*. A noun can never be a stative; a locative can never be a universal. The classification of a base as a noun, a stative, a universal, a locative, or a personal, tells us all that needs to be known about the grammatical constructions into which it can enter (Biggs 1969, p. 51).

Thus, in 1969 Biggs classified a stative as “any base which can be used verbally but not passively”. A G-base or ‘universal’ was classified as “any word which may be used passively” and is “able to enter into nominal as well as verbal phrases” (Biggs 1969, p. 52).

Following on from the work of Biggs, there was an upsurge of literature on the structure of Māori. The first of these was Hohepa’s thesis, *A Profile Generative Grammar of Māori* (Hohepa 1967). Hohepa’s work was based on a “mixture of structuralist taxonomic and Chomskyan approaches” and proposed “a set of transformational-generative rules for the basic structure of Māori” (Bauer 1981, p. 16). It did not, however, provide any new insights into the structure of Māori. In a subsequent article on negation, Hohepa (1969) did, however, examine one aspect of verbal classification in discussing the use of *kore* as a stative verb and as the head of the verbal constituent of an embedded clause. In this work, Hohepa made a distinction between what he referred to as ‘stative verbs’ and what he referred to as ‘stative adjectives’. This distinction was based upon a number of arguments. Hohepa proposed six criteria for the stative verb class as follows (Hohepa 1969, pp. 9 -14):

- (i) The subject is a noun marked by *i*, while the object is an unmarked noun phrase.
- (ii) When an object is *Ko* fronted, the particle *ai* is left as the last item of the verbal constituent and the accusative marker of the object is deleted. With noun phrases initiated by the *nā* case marker the copy *ai* is left following the verb.
- (iii) A member of either subcategory cannot tolerate ‘object incorporation’ and overt passivization.
- (iv) All statives when preceded by the causative prefix, *whaka*, syntactically become derived transitive verbs. Following affixation, stative verbs can incorporate both object and overt passivization.
- (v) Some stative verbs and adjectives, but no other word class members, take *kia* as the verbal constituent marker in an imperative construction;
- (vi) The particle *kia* is normally the obligatory marker if a stative is the verb in the subordinate or lower sentence of a subjunctive construction.

Hohepa’s five criteria for dividing statives into stative verbs and stative adjectives were as follows (Hohepa 1969, pp. 14 - 17):

- (i) State verbs can take state adjectives as a modifier in a sentence, whereas state adjectives functioning in a similar way cannot take a stative as a modifier; but can tolerate another stative adjective as a modifier.
- (ii) Stative verbs do not tolerate partial reduplication in the way that state adjectives do.
- (iii) The subject of a stative verb when used with the indefinite article *he* is acceptable, but stative adjectives cannot be used in the same construction.
- (iv) Some stative adjectives have a polar opposite in meaning.
- (v) Stative adjectives can be replaced by proforms, where the stative verb cannot.

In her work on case marking and grammatical relations in Polynesian languages, Chung (1978, p. 47) provided an interesting perspective on the debate on the verb class in Māori. She classified verbs in Polynesian languages into two syntactic classes:

*Intransitives*, which are subcategorized for a subject but not a direct object; and *transitives*, which are subcategorized for both a subject and direct object. Transitive verbs can further be classified as canonical transitive or middle, largely on the basis of their semantics. Canonical transitive verbs describe events which produce a direct, often physical effect on the direct object, while middle verbs describe events on the direct object immediately. Included among the middle verbs in Polynesian languages are perception verbs (‘see’, ‘listen to’), verbs of emotion and other psychological states (‘love’, ‘want’, ‘understand’), verbs normally selecting animate direct objects, including some communication verbs (‘meet with’, ‘help’, ‘call’), and verbs such as ‘follow’, ‘wait for’, and ‘visit’ (*italics added*).

Chung's classification of 'middle verbs' in Polynesian languages as perception verbs, verbs of emotion, and verbs normally selecting animate direct objects, offered a new perspective on the classification of verbs in Polynesian languages, including Māori. Although this approach offers an interesting insight into the semantic classification of verbs in Māori, it has not been without its critics (see for example, Bauer 1981, 1984). However, other scholars (e.g. Reedy 1979) have taken a similar approach.

Reedy distinguished between intransitives and transitives, noting that these two classes can be further subdivided "according to semantic criteria, the derivational processes that apply to them i.e., affixation, the case marking, and syntactic behaviour of their nuclear (obligatory) and satellite (non-obligatory) noun phrases" (Reedy 1979, p. 21). Reedy divided intransitive verbs into three classes (stative, adjectival, and experience verbs), noting that the stative and adjectival types were tentatively adopted from Hohepa's (1969) classification of the stative class. Reedy's designation of the third class, that is, experience verbs, relates to their obligatory co-occurrence with animate noun phrases (a restriction that does not apply to the stative and adjectival categories). Reedy noted that the patient noun phrase is the only obligatory noun phrase that is accepted for the formation of a nuclear sentence in an intransitive verb in Māori. Reedy (1979) subdivides the transitive verb class into two subgroups: Class I, and Class II verbs. Class I verbs take one object, Class II verbs take more than one object.

Bauer (1981) also classified verbs into two main classes. However, she notes that the boundaries between transitive and intransitive are somewhat blurred in Māori, and for this reason avoids using the term 'transitive' wherever possible, preferring to refer to compulsory or non-compulsory inclusion of one, or more than one argument (Bauer 1981, p. 26). Following the terminology of Biggs (1961, 1969), Bauer (1981) identified the major distinguishing characteristics of 'stative' verbs as:

- (i) their incompatibility with passivization;
- (ii) the fact that they require only one argument;
- (iii) the need for a distinction between the 'causer' of a state and the 'recipient' of the consequences of that state (pp. 70 -74).

Bauer argued that 'experience' verbs (mental activity verbs) do not form "a class with well-formed boundaries, although the central members of the class exhibit consistent behavioural properties which differentiate them from other bivalent verbs" (Bauer 1981, p. 77). In a later article, Bauer (1984) presented three hypotheses (the transitivity-cline, the verb-feature, and the separate class hypothesis) to support her recognition of inconsistencies within this class of verbs in Māori. She points out that this group of verbs has traditionally been classed as a transitive verb because it requires two nominal arguments (the first being an unmarked subject noun and the latter noun phrase being marked either with *i* or *ki*).

Hooper has argued that the name 'stative' is misleading and instead has adopted the term 'neuter', a categorization based on eight syntactic features. Thus, according to Hooper (1982, p. 34), neuter verbs:

- (i) cannot take the passive suffix;
- (ii) cannot have subjects that are addressees of imperatives;
- (iii) cannot occur after the subordinator *ki te*;
- (iv) cannot be accompanied by an agent phrase of the form *e noun phrase*<sub>2</sub>;
- (v) cannot be used as headwords of nominal phrases;
- (vi) cannot directly modify other bases;
- (vii) cannot have subjects introduced by the indefinite article *he*;
- (viii) must have agent phrases which take the form *i noun phrase*.

Bauer (1993, p. 85), following the suggestions made by Hooper (1982) changed this class from 'stative' to 'neuter' verbs noting that the term 'stative' is semantically misleading. She observed that this category shares some characteristics with adjectival predicates, but unlike adjectival predicates, however, they are not notionally stative.

Bauer (1993) also divides intransitives into active intransitives (e.g. *haere* 'move', *oma* 'run', *noho* 'stay'), and stative intransitives (e.g. *pai* 'good', *nui* 'big', *hē* 'wrong') noting that these verbs require only one nominal argument (the subject). She referred to active intransitives as being 'canonical' (generally appearing as the standard form), 'stative' or 'adjectival'. In addition to the intransitive (active and stative) and neuter categories, Bauer referred to a transitive category, distinguishing between active transitives, (e.g. *kōhuru* 'murder'), and passive transitives, (e.g. *pūhi-a* 'shot'). This category of verbs (transitives) requires two oblique noun phrases. A further category, ditransitives, (including, for example, *hoatu* and *homai*), require three noun phrases.

In a later work Bauer (1997, p. 15) added two further verb categories called reflexive and reciprocal. These she termed as a transitive action where the recipient of the action can be the same as the initiator. A reflexive verb (e.g. *shave*) is an action which involves one participant and a reciprocal verb (e.g. *hug*) is an action which involves two participants. She provides a definition of transitivity as the relationship between an event/action that is expressed by a verb constituent and the participants in that event/action. She adds that these verb types are normally classified according to the number of participants required for the event or action to take place:

One participant (which is animate) is required for an act of sneezing (namely the sneezer), but two participants are required for the act of beating (one of them animate, the beater, the other either animate or inanimate, the person or thing beaten). For an act of giving, there are three participants: the one who gives, the one who receives, and the object given (Bauer 1997, p. 12)

Bauer (1997, p. 13) defines a transitive verb as involving an action that requires two participants. A transitive sentence must, therefore, have the following properties:

- it has a transitive verb;
- the performer of the action is expressed in the Subject;
- the entity affected by the action is expressed as the Direct Object.

Thus, Bauer's distinction between canonical transitive verbs and experience verbs is based on the different behaviour of the performer. For a canonical transitive, the performer "is the initiator or agent who performs the action of their own will, and the other NP [noun phrase] is a patient which expresses the recipient or undergoer of the action" (p.13). However, for an experience verb, the performer of the action "has an experience (and is not appropriately described as doing something of their own will), and the second noun phrase is not directly affected by the action, unlike the patients of canonical transitives" (p.13). Intransitive verbs require one participant only. Thus, intransitive sentences are sentences that require a subject constituent but no direct object constituent. The division of intransitive verbs into two groups (action intransitives and state transitives) is based on the different position of the performer within the obligatory noun phrase. For an action intransitive, the obligatory noun phrase "indicates the person who performs the action, usually of their own will" and for a state intransitive, the noun phrase " indicates the person who undergoes the action or who is found in the state identified by the verb" (p.14). Neuter verbs are also added to the latter class because they require only one participant, the undergoer of the action. However, "some of [these verbs] are used to encode actions which appear transitive in semantic terms" (p.14). Ditransitive verbs are defined as a class of verbs requiring three noun phrases (e.g. *hoatu* 'give', and *tuku* 'send'). There are, as Bauer noted, some verbs in Māori that do not fit into these patterns. For instance, a transitive verb like *heu* (shave) may involve either (a) an initiator who is also the recipient of the action, or (b) an initiator who is not the recipient of the action. Where one person only is involved, the verb form is reflexive. Verbs involving two people doing the same thing to each other (i.e., *i awahi rāua tahi* 'they hugged each other') are described as reciprocal.

The work of Bauer may be compared with that of Harlow (1996, pp. 4 – 5) in which verbs are divided into five categories according to the differences in the constructions they may enter into. Thus:

- Transitive verbs take an affected direct object, usually marked by *i* (subgrouped also into bitransitives: verbs which take both a direct and an indirect object);
- Experience verbs have imperative marking and are incompatible with the actor emphatic construction;
- Neuter verbs typically have a subject which is the patient and an agent which, if explicit, is marked by the oblique preposition *i*.

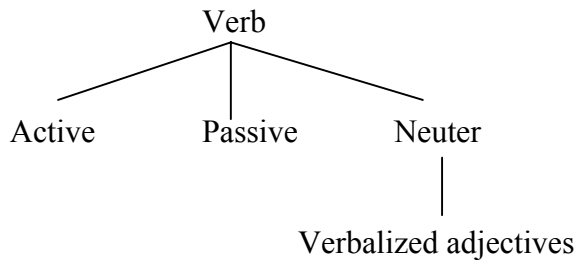
Intransitive verbs . . . have one undeletable argument;

Adjective verbs . . . have three characteristic distributions: (a) as a modifier following a noun or verb, (b) predicatively with *he* or with tense/aspect particles, and (c) following a determiner, as a corresponding abstract.

### **Review of landmarks in the history of the classification of verbs in Māori**

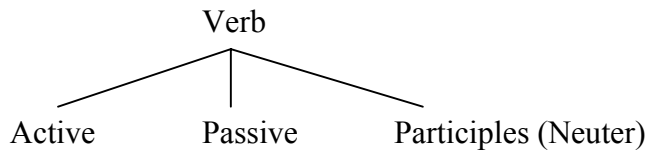
A schematic representation of different accounts of the verb class in Māori is provided below. The categorization offered in Maunsell (1842) is illustrated in Figure 1 following:

**Figure 1: Categories of Verb in Māori according to Maunsell (1842)**



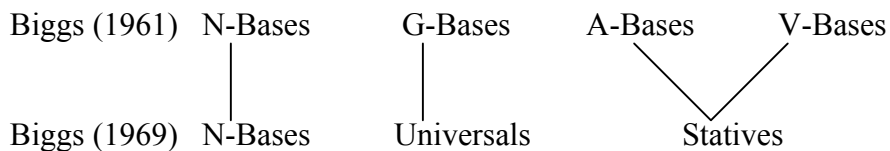
In some later accounts (e.g. Hooper 1984), the term ‘neuter’ is replaced by the term ‘intransitive’.

**Figure 2: Categories of Verb in Māori according to Williams (1862)**



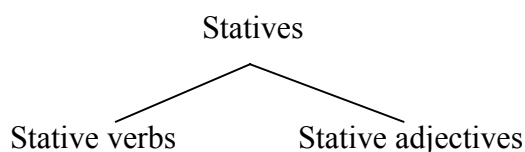
Williams used the term ‘participle’ rather than ‘verbalized adjective’, claiming that these verbs did not express the intrinsic or essential quality of a thing. However, in a later account of his work (see, for example, Williams and Williams 1965), the term ‘neuter verb’ was used for convenience.

**Figure 3: Categories of Verb in Māori according to Biggs (1961, 1969)**



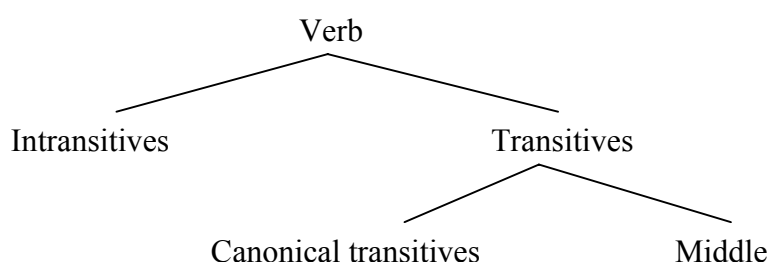
Biggs (1961, 1969) uses the terms ‘stative’ and ‘universal’ rather than ‘base’, applying distributional criteria (including the occurrence of the passive suffix) to support the distinction. These distributional criteria allowed for words such as *waiata* (which can occur as the head of a verb phrase and with the passive suffix C-ia) to be treated as verbs.

**Figure 4: Distinction between Stative Verbs and Stative Adjectives as proposed by Hohepa (1969)**



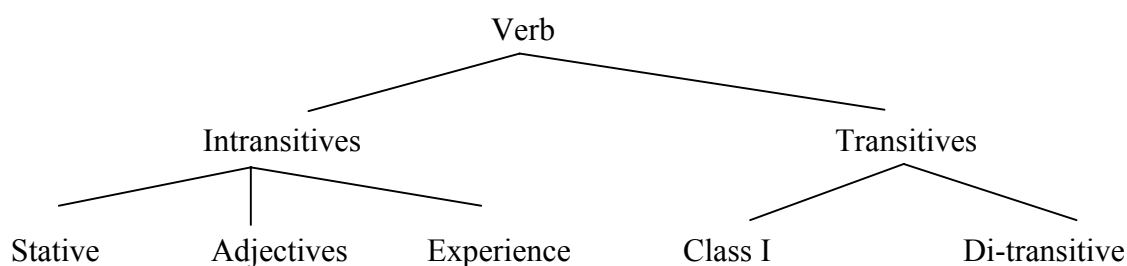
Among Hohepa's criteria for this categorization (Hohepa 1969) is the use of the particle *kia* as a verbal constituent marker in an imperative construction. However, although *mate*, *mutu*, and *hemo* all meet Hohepa's other criteria for statives, they fail to occur in pseudo-imperative constructions. Hohepa argues that *kia* is an obligatory marker of stative in cases where the verb occurs in the subordinate construction or as the lower clause of a subjunctive construction. However, experience verbs in Māori (which do not belong to Hohepa's stative category) occur obligatory with *kia* in these contexts. Reedy (1978) has argued that Hohepa's five arguments in favor of a division between stative verbs and stative adjectives are problematic, claiming that only one of these arguments (the fact that stative adjectives cannot precede stative verbs) appears to be valid.

**Figure 5: Verb Categorization in Polynesian Languages according to Chung (1978)**



Chung (1978) proposed a distinction in Polynesian languages between canonical transitive and middle verbs. Bauer (1984) has, however, rejected Chung's use of 'experience' verbs in her classification, pointing out that Chung's third category (verbs normally selecting animate direct objects) is made up of verbs (e.g. *āwhina* 'help', *karanga* 'call') that are canonical rather than transitive and do not involve experience verbs.

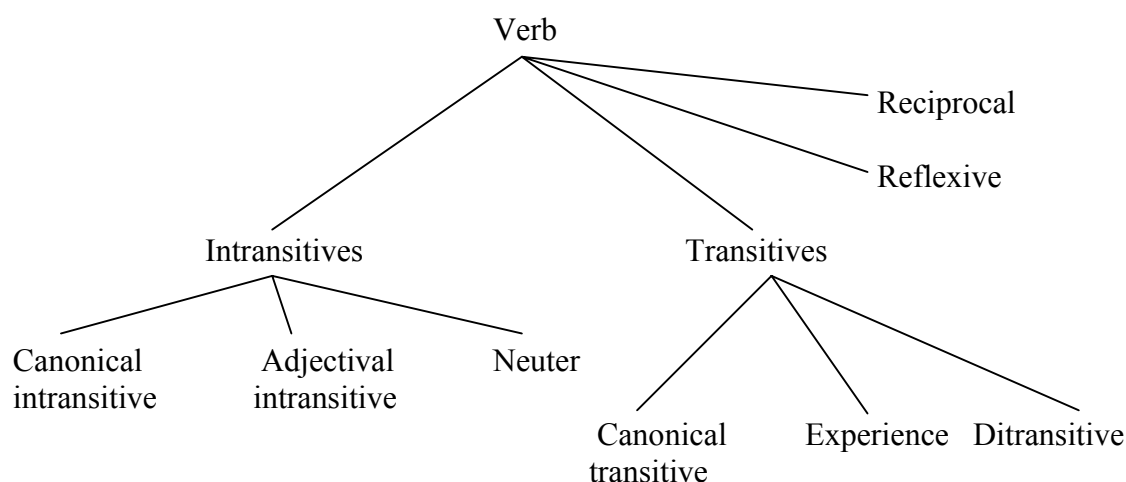
**Figure 6: Classification of Verbs in Māori According to Reedy (1979)**



Reedy (1979) also classifies verbs in Māori into two distinct classes: intransitives and transitives. He divides intransitive verbs into three classes: stative, adjectives, and experience verbs (following Hohepa's (1969) classification of the stative class). He also makes a distinction within the transitive verb class into two types: *Class I*, and *Class II*. *Class I* verbs are object affecting and *Class II* are di-transitive. Reedy distinguishes experience verbs from adjectives and statives on the basis that experience verbs must have an animate noun phrase. He classifies these verbs as intransitives (where Chung (1978) classed them as transitive) on the basis that derivational

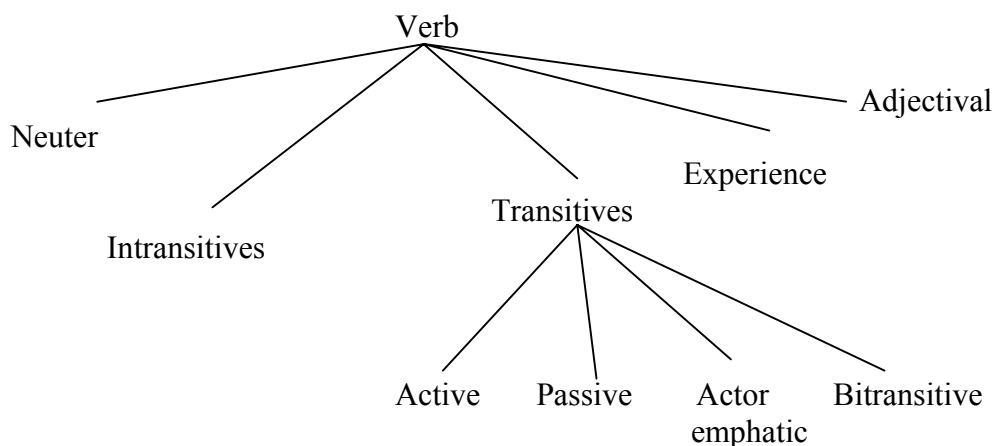
processes that operate on other intransitives also apply to experience verbs. Bauer (1984), however, argues that members of this class do not form a class with distinct boundaries although they exhibit similar behavioural properties.

**Figure 7: Classification of Verbs in Māori According to Bauer (1981, 1984, 1993, 1997)**



Bauer (1981; 1984) has also classified verbs into two distinct classes: intransitive and transitive, refining the boundaries between transitive and intransitive in later works (Bauer 1993; 1997). Thus, Bauer (1993) classifies intransitives as active and stative, calling the active intransitives ‘canonical intransitives’ and the stative intransitives ‘adjectival intransitives’. She also identifies a neuter category (in line with Hooper (1982)), which replaces the term ‘stative verbs’ as used in her earlier work (Bauer, 1981). Transitive verbs are classified as either active or passive, with passives being either ‘canonical transitives’, or ‘experience verbs’. A further class is ditransitive verbs. More recently, Bauer (1997) has recognized reflexive verbs and reciprocal verbs as separate categories.

Bauer’s latest work (1997) combines syntactic and semantic criteria in the classification of verbs, relying heavily on case roles (see, for example, Fillmore 1968) in her analysis and categorization of experience verbs. Thus, for example, in the case of action intransitives, the obligatory noun phrase indicates the person who performs the action, whereas in the case of state intransitives, the noun phrase either (a) indicates the person who performs the action, or (b) the person who is found in the state identified by the verb. Although Bauer’s classification of verbs in Māori has much in common with Reedy’s account (Reedy 1979), it differs in its treatment of intransitives. Thus, whereas the intransitive class proposed by Reedy includes statives, adjectives, and experience verbs, Bauer’s intransitive class includes canonical intransitives (active intransitives), adjectival intransitives (stative intransitives), and neuter verbs.

**Figure 8: Verb Category Distinctions According to Harlow (1996)**

Harlow (1996) divides verbs in Māori into five categories. The transitive category includes active, passive, actor emphatic, and bitransitive subcategories.

### Discussion

Foster has claimed that “the Māori verb must be one of the best and most clearly arranged in any of the world’s languages, and is therefore very easy to learn” (Foster, 1997, p. 21). Statements such as this belie the complexities that have gradually been uncovered. Some accounts of verbs in Māori are largely morphological and syntactic in nature: relying on derivational processes such as affixation, case marking and constituent placement; others include semantic criteria. How these criteria are weighted leads to different emphasis in the classification. Thus, for example, Reedy (1979) relying heavily on morpho-syntactic criteria classifies experience verbs as intransitives, whereas Bauer (1994), relying partly on semantic criteria, classifies them as transitives. Harlow (1996) concludes that they should be treated as a separate category.

What appears to receive insufficient recognition in some of these accounts is the importance of acknowledging that the same lexeme may be assigned to a different word class on different occasions. Thus, for example, a verb such as *mate* ‘death’ may be either a verb or noun depending on context and function. In examples, (5) and (6) below, *mate* is intransitive. In each case, however, it has a different sense. This difference in sense is not encoded in the verb itself, but signalled by the pre-verbal markers (Reedy, personal communication, 1998):

(5) *Kua mate a Rangi* (Rangi is dead).

(6) *Kei te mate a Rangi* (Rangi is sick).

In example (7) below, *mate* follows the determiner *te*, and is, therefore, in syntactic terms, classifiable as a noun rather than a verb:

(7) *Ka ea te mate o Rangi* (The death of Rangi has been avenged).

The implication of this is that the discussion of word classes in Māori should distinguish clearly between lexemes and word-forms and between forms and grammatical functions. *Waiata* (sing) is a lexeme whose word-forms are *i waiata* ‘sang’, *kua waiata* ‘has sung’ etc. Two word-forms are said to have the same syntactic function and, therefore to belong to the same word class if they have the same distribution. Thus, for example, *ngeru* ‘cat’ and *kurī* ‘dog’ belong to the same word class (noun); *ngā ngeru* ‘cats’ and *ngā kurī* ‘dogs’ belong to the same word class (noun); *haere* ‘move’ and *hoki* ‘return’ belong to the same word class (verb). However, *haere* ‘move’ (verb) and *nui* ‘big’ (adjective) belong to different word classes. Word forms have the same syntactic distribution, whereas word classes may not.

Distinguishing between lexemes and word-forms and between forms and grammatical functions highlights those differences in the distribution of particular lexemes in Māori which is fundamental to the need to classify them in different ways on different occasions of use. It also highlights the problems associated with, for example, the treatment by Biggs (1961, 1969) of *waiata* as being a verb irrespective of its syntactic environment. Thus, in example (8) below, *waiata* ‘sang’ is a word form relating to the lexeme ‘sing’. It has the syntactic characteristics of past participle and it functions syntactically as a verb. In example (9) below, *waiata* ‘has sung’ is also a word form relating to the lexeme ‘sing’. It has the syntactic characteristics of past perfect and it functions syntactically as a verb. In example (10) below, *waiata* ‘song’ functions syntactically as a noun:

(8) <i>I waiata ia</i>	‘She sang’	
Lexeme:	<i>waiata</i>	‘sing’
Word form:	‘ <i>i waiata</i> ’	‘sang’
Word class:	verb	
(9) <i>Kua waiata ia.</i>	‘She has sung’	
Lexeme:	<i>waiata</i>	‘sing’
Word form:	‘ <i>kua waiata</i> ’	‘has sung’
Word class:	verb	
(10) <i>Kei te waiata ia i te waiata.</i>	‘She is singing the song’	
Lexeme:	‘song’	
Word form:	‘song’	
Word class:	noun	

These few examples demonstrate the importance of defining the term ‘word class’ clearly in relation to lexemes, word forms, and word classes before attempting to establish criteria for word class membership. As soon as this is done, it becomes clear that assignment to a class or sub-class in a particular instance will depend on form, context and the function, these themselves, however, often being related to inherent semantic properties. Thus, Bauer’s distinction between canonical transitive verbs and experience verbs is based on semantic properties. Where semantic properties have morphological and/or syntactic implications, they can validly form the basis for the recognition of different groupings within the same word class. Following this approach may lead in the future to further sub-categorization of verbs in Māori.

In the light of what has been presented within the various analyses of this paper, we are now in a position to put forward a number of questions on the verb in Māori:

- Is there such a thing as a ‘verb’ in Māori?
- What constitutes the verb word class in Māori?
- If there is, how should it be described?

When defining word classes in a language, a linguist uses formal and functional definitions rather than semantic ones. Words are assigned to word classes on the basis of their morphological (the form of the word) and syntactic behaviour (the types of words that the word can occur with) as opposed to semantic definitions (the meaning of the word). “Although semantic definitions of word classes have some validity, they are neither totally adequate nor totally accurate” (Crowley, Lynch, Siegel & Piau 1995, p. 11). The formal definitions for the word class ‘verb’ in Māori should describe how the members of this class behave and not on a characterization of shared meanings. Thus, for example, a definition like the following would not suffice as a formal definition for the verb word class in Māori (or for any language in particular): ‘a verb is a doing word or a word which describes an action’. This type of definition is based primarily upon semantic criteria. However, a statement such as the following may categorize a formal definition of the word class verb in Māori (this should be regarded as only an example at this point in the discussion and not as a formal definition of the verb class in Māori): a verb occurs immediately after a pre-verbal marker in Māori. This type of definition is not based semantic criteria but on syntactic criteria.

Let us now reconsider the following examples in Māori that were discussed earlier in this section of the paper: *mate* and *waiata*.

Are these words nouns or verbs? If we were using semantic criteria to classify these two examples, it would be difficult to provide a definite answer because both of these words can function as both a noun and a verb in Māori. However, what we should recognise is that each of these examples can function as a noun and a verb and that there is an overlapping of class membership between these two examples. Hence, we do not say that *mate* is a verb or a noun; rather that in sentences like (5) and (6) above, the word *mate* is functioning as a verb, while in a sentence like (7) above, it is functioning as a noun. Similarly, the word *waiata* is functioning as a verb in sentences like (8) and (9) above, and it is functioning as a noun in (10) above.

### **Conclusion**

Assignment to a particular word class, or to a particular category within a particular word class, depends on an equation that includes form, function and context. The history of word class assignment in Māori, particularly assignment to the verb category, indicates the problems and disagreements that can arise when one aspect of the equation is omitted or under represented.

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