

B) “KO” THE POINTING OUT WORD

Imagine a boy is with us and we ask him who he is and who his father is.

In English he says – “I am Rewi. My father is Hata.”

He will emphasise those underlined words. Those are the names, the information we want.

In Maori he says – “Ko Rewi ahau. Ko Hata tōku pāpā.”

Literally translated – “Rewi I. Hata my father.”

The emphasis in Maori is provided by this little word ‘**ko**’. It is purely a grammatical word – like ‘the’ and ‘a’ or ‘an’ in English which are used all the time to add meaning to other words but on their own they mean nothing. ‘**Ko**’ is used in Maori to draw attention to, to specify, some particular person(s), thing(s) or fact(s).

Text books call ‘**ko**’ the ‘specific article’. A more colloquial and equally suitable term is ‘the pointer word’. It is used in speech as one points with a finger as a gesture. In fact one may quite often point or make some like gesture when making a statement beginning with ‘**ko**’. Some examples:

Ko tēnei tāku pukapuka.

This my book.

Ko tērā tāna pukapuka.

That his book.

Ko Hoani tōku pāpā, ko Rangi tāku tama. *Hoani my father, Rangi my son.*

You will notice that the English ‘is’ does not appear in the above literal translations. That is because there is no equivalent of our verb ‘to be’ in Maori – no ‘am, is, was, were’. Forget all about those words when expressing yourself in Maori – the Maori language is perfectly understandable without them.

Use ‘**ko**’ when introducing people (ie. when pointing out who they are).

Ko tāku wahine tēnei.

My wife this. (This is my wife).

Ko tāku tāne tēnei.

My husband this. (This is my husband).

Ko tōku hoa tērā, ko Ani.

My friend over there, Ani.

(That’s my friend over there, that’s Anne).

You will find as you learn Maori that the emphasised, ie. the most important part of a statement, always comes first. Keeping this always in mind will greatly help you to use the language properly and be readily understood. (Maori grammar is really very simple but a simple mistake can make what you say the very opposite of what you want it to mean).