Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development

ISSN: 0143-4632 (Print) 1747-7557 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rmmm20

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To cite this article: Julie Barbour, Bryony Walker, Nicola Daly, Darryn Joseph, Te Kani Price, Nicholas Vanderschantz, Pania Tahau-Hodges, Kawata Teepa & Eboni Waitere (17 Oct 2025): Representations of te reo Māori and te ao Māori in a translingual picturebook: *How my Koro became a Star*, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, DOI: 10.1080/01434632.2025.2572441

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2025.2572441

Published online: 17 Oct 2025.

JOURNAL OF MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2025.2572441

Representations of te reo Māori and te ao Māori in a translingual picturebook: *How my Koro became a Star*

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ABSTRACT

While English is the most commonly used language in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is a multilingual nation with two languages recognised as official: te reo Māori (the Māori language) and New Zealand Sign Language. The English language is dominant in children's literature published in Aotearoa New Zealand, but since the 1980s there has been an increase in the number of picturebooks featuring two languages, te reo Māori and English. Previous work has explored how representations of te reo Māori and English in pukapuka pikitia reorua (dual language picturebooks) in Aotearoa reflect changing attitudes towards the two languages. In this article, we focus particularly on Brianne Te Paa and Story Hemi-Morehouse's picturebook *How my Koro became a Star*. Originally written in te reo Māori, this multi-award winning picturebook is located at the beginning of Matariki, the Māori New Year celebration. In a move away from the linguistic analysis of te reo Māori being 'borrowed' by English, we consider how storytellers like Te Paa weave Māori language together with English in a translingual publication, supporting reader comprehension of Māori vocabulary and cultural meanings through embedded illustrations and explanations, inviting the curious reader to learn beyond the story.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 4 July 2025
Accepted 4 October 2025

KEYWORDS
Māori language; translingual picturebooks; language revitalisation; Indigenous language and culture

Introduction and background

Aotearoa New Zealand is home to many introduced languages, and just two official languages: the Indigenous Māori language, and the more recently recognised New Zealand Sign Language. The most commonly spoken and *de facto* official language of the nation is English, introduced during the colonisation of Aotearoa by English-speaking settlers from England, Scotland and Ireland. Beginning in 1840 after Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) was signed (Orange 2023), colonisation brought speakers of te reo Māori (the Māori language) and speakers of English into close contact. Interactions between the settler populations and Indigenous Māori people produced changes in both languages, but it was te reo Māori that experienced profoundly damaging impacts. Decades of the deliberate suppression of Māori language in favour of English across prestigious domains including governance and law, education, religion and business led to the disruption of intergenerational language transmission (Harlow 2007). At best, the suppression of the Māori language can be seen as a systemic failure of the New Zealand Government to protect an Indigenous

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taonga, a treasure of the Māori people. It wasn't until 1987 that the language was formally recognised and given protection under the Māori Language Act 1987. This act, revised as Te Ture mō Te Reo Māori 2016, initiated a period of government-supported language revitalisation and education that continues today (Harlow 2007), in an effort to redress the wrongs of the not-so-distant past. Despite this legislation, the damages of colonisation have meant that the majority of people who identify as Māori are not fluent speakers and fewer than a quarter of Māori are first language speakers (StatsNZ 2022). There is, however, a growing appetite for Māori medium education for children (McCallum 2025), and for language learning courses for adults (Te Mātāwai 2024), to allow Māori to reclaim their heritage language.

Today, those of us who reside in Aotearoa New Zealand observe Māori language in the linguistic landscape on the signage that guides us through the natural and built environments, in advertising, on commercial vehicles in our cities, and in our education centres (Panther et al. 2023, 3). Māori vocabulary is commonly used by speakers and writers of New Zealand English. Twenty years ago, John Macalister (2005) collated a dictionary of Māori words that have currency for New Zealand English speakers, and the use of te reo Māori by speakers of New Zealand English is considered to be the most distinctive feature of our dialect of English (see e.g. Deverson 1984; Gordon and Deverson 1985, 1989). For Māori and non-Māori alike, Māori language is part of the repertoire of linguistic skills that speakers draw on, to a greater or lesser degree. For people who identify as Māori, but who have been denied access to their heritage language as a result of colonisation, translanguaging with (or code-switching into) Māori is an important strategy to signal one's identity (Stubbe and Holmes 2000, 255–256), and one's politics (Marras Tate and Rapatahana 2022), as well as to facilitate Māori language learning (Seals and Olsen-Reeder 2020).

Children's literature, including picturebooks, has been described as offering readers insight into themselves and others (Fox and Short 2003). Picturebooks in Aotearoa have the potential to both reflect and influence the interaction between the Māori language and New Zealand English (Barbour, Daly, and Wessels 2025), providing concrete and visible representations of our Indigenous language alongside English in a print form for children that has long been a mirror for the English language at the expense of Māori voices (cf. Hadaway and Young 2013). Working with Huia Publishers (HUIA), a leading Indigenous publisher in Aotearoa, we are a team of researchers and publishing professionals, both Māori and Pākehā, engaged in a three-year project. Collectively we have expertise in te reo Māori ranging from award-winning authors and translators, to enthusiastic beginners. Similarly, we have a range of expertise in mātauranga Māori, with highly knowledgeable cultural insiders and curious outsiders. Together, we aim to explore the publishing processes, design and illustration, translation practices, and contributions to language reclamation and revitalisation in picturebooks published by HUIA. In this article, we report on one component of our work, documenting the visible and tangible linguistic diversity found in a selected New Zealand picturebook, *How my Koro became a Star* by Brianne Te Paa (2022a), illustrated by Story Hemi-Morehouse. We seek to exemplify the ways in which a picturebook can increase the representation of te reo Māori, thus providing a resource for language reclamation.

Literature review

Research concerning the use of multiple languages in picturebooks is burgeoning, having been neglected in the field of children's literature research for many years. The focus of picturebook research can be loosely divided into two main areas: the design and layout of the languages represented (e.g. Albers 2008; Phinney and Colabucci 2010; Daly 2019; Serafini and Clausen 2012; Serafini, Kachorsky, and Reid 2018; Vanderschantz 2008; Vanderschantz et al. 2010), and the ways in which readers (children and adults) interact with picturebooks (e.g. Figueiredo et al. 2013; Timpany and Vanderschantz 2012, 2013; Timpany et al. 2014; Vanderschantz and Timpany 2012). Research has also investigated how picturebooks might be designed to increase interaction and shared

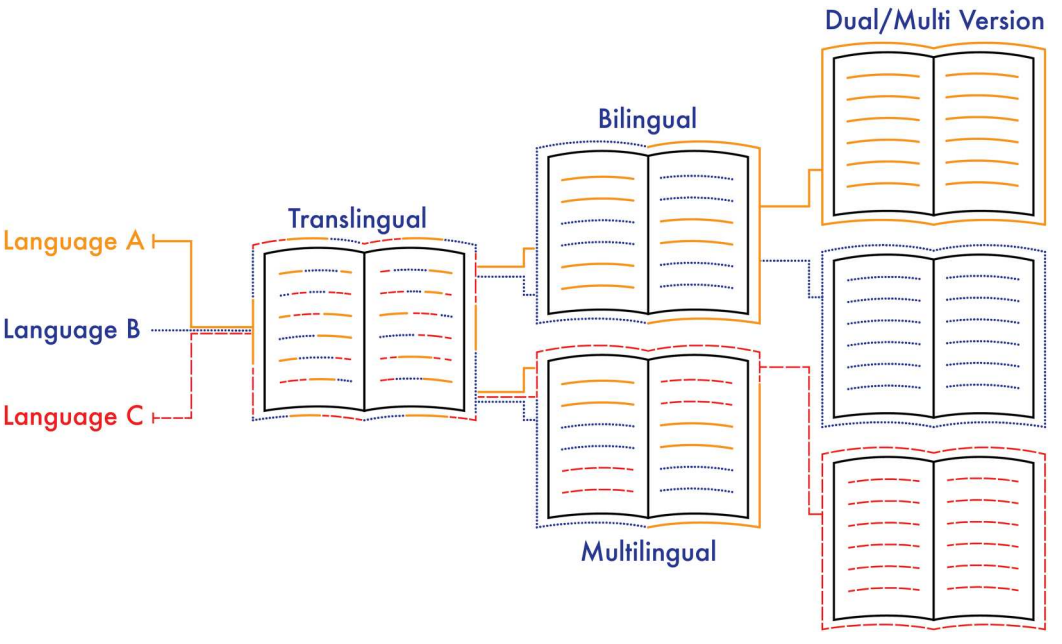

Figure 1. Forms of Dual and Multi Language Picturebooks (developed from Daly 2024, p. 34). Image © Hazel Stanley-Burroughs. Used with permission.

reading (e.g. Bergman Deitcher, Aram, and Adar 2019; Vanderschantz, Timpany, and Wright 2020, 2023, october 9-13) and how picturebooks are being used in monolingual and multilingual classrooms (e.g. Callow 2018; Hassett and Curwood 2009). Our research extends this scholarship on dual and multi language picturebooks. Figure 1 offers a visualisation of different configurations of languages in picturebooks.

The configuration of languages in books featuring two or more languages conveys information about language attitudes, language boundaries, and language hierarchies (Daly et al. 2025). With a particular focus on translingual English-Māori picturebooks, Barbour, Daly, and Wessels (2025) have explored how the presence or absence of italics and macrons on Māori words contradicts the prevailing linguistic understanding of Māori words as loanwords in New Zealand English; instead, the typographic design indicates that the two languages are separate. Work by Vanderschantz and Daly (2023) and Vanderschantz, Daly, and San (2022, 2025) has explored how bilingual Māori-English picturebooks use font size, weight and text order to place both languages on a page in ways which can be interpreted as giving more power to one language over another, either replicating or challenging linguistic hierarchies.

Ways in which readers respond to dual and multi language picturebooks have been examined in a number of ways, and in a number of settings. Naqvi et al. (2013), Zaidi (2020), and Daly and Limbrick (2020) have shown that when bilingual texts featuring the home languages of children are brought into classrooms, there is increased engagement, and interest from the children whose languages are represented, and from those for whom the languages are unfamiliar. In the United States, children in an after-school programme engaged with dual language picturebooks from around the world as language inquirers, discussing what it means to know a language, and indeed, the very nature of language itself (Daly, Kleker, and Short 2022).

Other work has focused on in-service and pre-service teachers. In France, Hartmann and Hélot (2021) introduced preservice teachers to a trilingual picturebook and found that this experience increased the student's awareness of issues relating to multilingualism and multiliteracy, relevant to their work in future multilingual classrooms. In the United States, Daly and Short (2022)

introduced dual language picturebooks in all three formats (translingual, bilingual and dual edition) from around the world to preservice teachers in a children's literature class. These teachers were surprised that the books existed and quickly developed sophisticated critical discourse around their place in multilingual classrooms, and in support of Indigenous language revitalisation. In Wales, a similar introduction of Welsh–English dual language picturebooks, again in all three formats, exposed Welsh second language in-service teachers to the possibilities of how such picturebooks can be used to support their own and their students' language learning (Daly, Rosser, and Haf 2023).

Literacy materials for Indigenous languages around the world are vital for language maintenance and revitalisation (Barbour and Daly 2020; UNESCO 2003) and picturebooks that include Indigenous languages are an important literacy resource (Daly, Rosser and Haf 2025; Hadaway and Young 2013; Smith and Pryor 2022). In a programme for kindergarten parents, Brouwer and Daly (2022, 2023) showed how parents engaged with picturebooks featuring Māori and English to support their children in learning Māori, their heritage language. Teachers in Pacific kindergartens in Aotearoa also appreciated the support for their own and their children's learning of Pacific languages as they shared dual and multi language picturebooks (Kelly-Ware et al. 2024, 2025).

This brief literature survey provides evidence of a growing body of research that supports the notion that dual and multi language picturebooks, as cultural artefacts, both reflect attitudes and can change attitudes towards Indigenous and minority languages through their design and layout. The literature also strongly suggests that these picturebooks can be used to engage, draw on, and grow the linguistic repertoires of children, and to support teachers in language learning, teaching and revitalisation settings.

Method

Choice of book

The picturebook selected for analysis in this research is *How my Koro became a Star* [*My Koro*], written by Brianne Te Paa, illustrated by Story Hemi-Morehouse, and published by HUIA in 2022. This picturebook was selected for several reasons. Firstly, the author and illustrator identify as Māori, and the publisher is a leading Indigenous publisher in Aotearoa. Secondly, the subject matter of the picturebook foregrounds Māori themes and Māori identities. Thirdly, in our view, the picturebook represents a progression of Indigenous storytelling in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Early Indigenous picturebook stories that featured Māori themes and identities tended to position characters in narratives of the past, far removed from the experiences of young Māori readers (see e.g. Waerea's (1984) *Pukunui's Hangi*, Young's (1995) *Hinemoa & Tūtānekai: A Te Arawa legend*, and Tamehana's (1995) *Roimata's Cloak*). In contrast, *My Koro* features a contemporary Māori family engaging with a traditional cultural practice. Fourthly, the translingual edition of *My Koro* incorporates a wealth of Māori language. The range of vocabulary that is woven into the text, and the techniques employed to support reader comprehension, represent a progression in the inclusion and representation of te reo Māori by Māori authors.

Analysis of te reo Māori

The method used in analysing *My Koro* involves the identification and analysis of Māori words and phrases woven into the predominantly English text of the translingual edition. The process has 5 key phases, the first three of which have been conventionally used in linguistic research that has explored the outcomes of contact between two languages (Haspelmath and Tadmor 2009):

1. Identify and list the Māori vocabulary including the front and back covers, and the running text of the picturebook;

2. Record the meaning of each word, referring to *Te Aka Māori Dictionary* (Morefield 2003–2025);
3. Record the grammatical context in which each word occurs;
4. Record the illustrative context for each word;
5. Classify vocabulary into semantic domains, drawing on categories from the Indigenous Māori culture.

Phases 4 and 5 represent departures from linguistic research traditions concerning contact between te reo Māori and English in Aotearoa. Through phase 4, we acknowledge the central role of illustrations in picturebooks, stepping beyond the grammatical analysis of phase 3, to observe the contribution that illustrations make to supporting comprehension. This phase is considered to be essential in understanding the communicative work of picturebooks (Arizpe 2021; Sipe 2015).

Phase 5 is a departure from the conventional approach of assigning English categories to the Māori language that is used by speakers and writers of New Zealand English. The body of linguistic research that has explored language contact in Aotearoa has traditionally been anglocentric (see e.g. Bellett 1995; Hay, Maclagan, and Gordon 2008; Macalister 2004, 2006), with te reo Māori vocabulary described as being 'borrowed' by English speakers, rather than as being a separate language that is intentionally woven into New Zealand English texts (Barbour, Daly, and Wessels 2025). This particular phase was prompted by our research collaboration with HUIA.

In the first instance, *Te Aka Māori Dictionary* (Morefield 2003–2025), an online resource which offers definitions and examples of Māori vocabulary in context, was used to record the meanings of individual Māori words identified in the picturebook. These individual words were then grouped into semantic domains according to links in their meanings, and assigned semantic domain labels. Semantic domains (also 'semantic field' and 'lexical field') arise from the analysis of word meanings within their cultural context. This type of analysis is employed in lexicography (Haviland 2006), and linguistic anthropology (Dimmendaal 2016), as well as in the study of languages in contact (Haspelmath and Tadmor 2009). Some domains are core to the experience of being human (for example, kinship); others are more specific to individual cultures, and are experienced through those cultures (for example, religious and cultural cosmology and associated rituals and practices). The categories identified in this analysis emerged from the examination of the Māori language used within the text itself, interpreted in relation to the themes of the text, referenced against cultural analysis by Indigenous scholars, and checked by members of the research team.

Introducing Matariki and How my Koro became a Star by Brianne Te Paa

Before presenting the findings of our research, we offer a brief introduction to the development of the selected book, *How my Koro became a Star* (Te Paa 2022a). *My Koro* is a picturebook about Matariki. In te ao Māori, the Māori world, Matariki is the name of the constellation Pleiades. The term Matariki is understood to be an abbreviated form of the expression 'ngā mata o te ariki o Tāwhirimātea', meaning 'the eyes of the god Tāwhirimātea' (Matamua 2017b, 20). The disappearance of the constellation in the night sky in May/June, and its subsequent reappearance just before dawn during the last quarter of the lunar cycle in June/July is the sign of the Māori New Year. Māori would observe individual stars in the constellation for their 'brightness, distinctiveness, colour and distance from the surrounding stars' as well as 'the movement, colour and shape of the entire cluster' (Matamua 2017b, 59). Based on these observations, tohunga kōkōrangi, astronomers, would then make predictions about the coming year, related to the bounty of the gardens, birds, seafood, and freshwater produce, as well as winds and rainfall, and the health of the community as a whole. In 2022, Matariki became the first Indigenous public holiday in Aotearoa, taking place in the southern hemisphere's winter (June/July), at the end of the harvest period (Matariki 2025). The formal observance date for Matariki in the Gregorian calendar is linked to the lunar cycle, falling on the Friday which is closest to the correct lunar phase.

In 2022, author Brianne Te Paa (Ngāti Kahu, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Whātua, Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki and Te Whānau-a-Apanui) attended a workshop which included a presentation from Professor Rangi Matamua[1] about Matariki; in response, Te Paa wrote a translingual English-Māori poem titled *How my Koro became a Star.*[2] Te Paa recorded herself reading the poem and she then posted it online, on Facebook. The poem went viral, capturing the attention of numerous viewers, including the team at HUIA. Te Paa was encouraged by HUIA to develop a Māori language version of her poem for publication. Story Hemi-Morehouse[3] (Ngāti Koata and Ngāti Toa Rangatira) was recruited to create illustrations for the text, and subsequently, Māori language and translingual English-Māori editions of the children's picturebook were published. Both *How my Koro became a Star* (Te Paa 2022a) and the Māori language edition *Kua Whetūrangitia a Koro* (Te Paa 2022b) went on to win significant New Zealand book awards.[4]

In the next section we present findings from our examination of the interweaving of Māori language into the translingual edition of *My Koro* (Te Paa 2022a). We consider the ways in which the text and illustrations support accessibility of meaning to readers, both adults and children, who may be unfamiliar with the cultural practices and vocabulary presented in the picturebook. We demonstrate the efficacy of this particular picturebook in presenting a visible and tangible representation of the Indigenous Māori language and culture.

Findings

A key linguistic feature of *How my Koro became a Star* (Te Paa 2022a) is the presence of words and phrases from te reo Māori, the Māori language. A total of 91 Māori word tokens occur in the running text of the picturebook, representing 28 unique word and phrase types.[5] Among these, all except three function as nouns or noun phrases; 12 of the 28 are proper nouns. Unsurprisingly, the two most commonly occurring Māori words in the story are Matariki 'Pleiades' which occurs nine times, and Koro 'grandfather' which occurs 16 times. Maunga 'mountain' is the third most common word, occurring seven times. The maunga serves as the location from which Matariki is observed, a high point on the landscape. The main character in the story 'sat with Koro on a maunga'. He later asks his sister, 'Will you come with me up the maunga, before sunrise, to get a good view?'. Towards the end of the story, the family 'arrived at the top of the maunga'. This final mention of maunga is accompanied by an illustration of the family climbing a steep hill at night, with another mountainous hill silhouetted in the background. The written text and accompanying illustrations of maunga exemplify how the composition and visual design of *My Koro* supports readers to infer the meaning of Māori words, and their significance to the cultural practice being presented.

The Māori words and phrases included in *My Koro* are not random; rather, the vocabulary clusters into semantic domains that are central to the story, and key vocabulary is repeated through the text. In this article, we present findings from three semantic domains, these being (1) Matariki, the constellation Pleiades (Matamua 2017a, 2017b; Meredith 2009b) (2) Maramataka, the Māori lunar calendar (Meredith 2009a), and (3) whānau, family (Walker 2017). These three domains are tightly connected to the celebration of Matariki itself, an annual event which is tied to the appearance of the constellation during a particular moon phase and celebrated together by families. The three semantic domains are represented on the cover of the picturebook (Figure 2).

As we present our findings according to the three semantic domains, we consider the meanings of Māori words and how the meanings are supported in text and illustrations.

Matariki – the constellation Pleiades

The first semantic domain of significance in *My Koro* is Matariki – the constellation Pleiades. As many as nine stars in the constellation are named by Māori, and each one has a designated function. The constellation itself is known as Matariki; Matariki is the name of the star also known in the

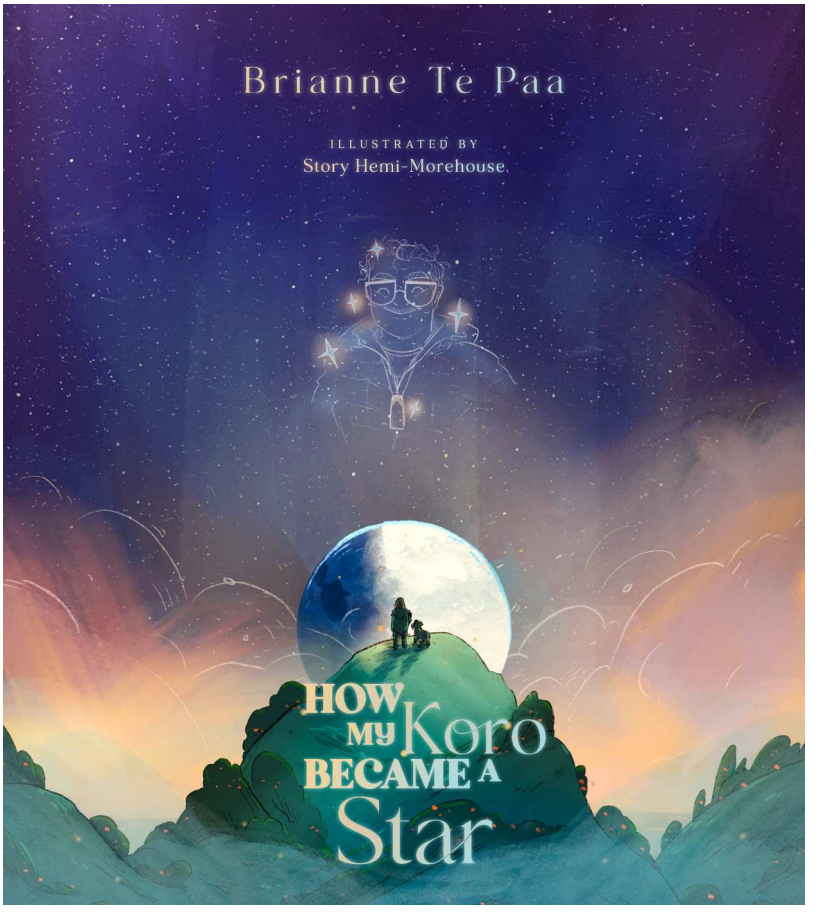

Figure 2. *Cover of* How my Koro became a Star *(*Te Paa 2022a*), depicting Matariki, the constellation in the early morning sky, Koro 'grandfather' as a spirit and the boy as representations of Whānau, and the moon representing the Maramataka.* Text © Brianne Te Paa. Illustrations © Story Hemi-Morehouse. Used with permission.

Greek tradition as Alcyone, the brightest star in the cluster (Matamua 2017b, 22); and Matariki is the name for the Māori New Year celebration. Te Paa's story opens during the Matariki celebration period, with a grandfather, Koro, teaching his moko or grandson about Matariki beliefs and practices (1).

(1) He taught me about Matariki, guiding Te Waka o Rangi[6] through the sky.
He taught me the name of each star and to give thanks with an offer of kai.

An important Matariki practice is the preparation of a ceremonial feast, a hautapu. The steam of the feast symbolically feeds the stars in the Matariki cluster. Four of the stars are associated with life and sustenance. Tupuānuku is the Māori name of the star Pleione (in the Greek tradition), associated with the bounty of the earth, with kūmara or sweet potato, and other foods grown in the ground. Waitā (known as Taygeta in the Greek tradition) is associated with the bounty of the ocean, with shellfish like mussels, salt-water fish and other sea creatures. Te Paa introduces these stars in the context of the hautapu ritual, where the stars are personified with a puku or belly, and offered kai from their domain (2). In the ceremony, it is steam from the cooking hautapu rather than food itself which serves as the offering.

(2) We made a hautapu in a pot with a lid with a kūmara for Tupuānuku.
Added mussels just for Waitā, they'd be sure to please his puku.

Waitī (Maia in the Greek tradition) is associated with the bounty of fresh water, with fish and creatures that live in rivers and lakes. Tupuārangi (Atlas in the Greek tradition) is associated with the bounty of the sky, with birds as well as with nuts, fruit and berries that grow overhead (3).

(3) We prepared an eel for Waitī, and put that in the hautapu too.
Tupuārangi would prefer kererū, but chicken would just have to do.

The illustration on the two-page spread that accompanies (2) and (3) shows different foods flowing into the cooking pot. The kererū, now a protected bird in Aotearoa, but once a common food source, is illustrated making an escape off the right side of the spread. A plucked chicken carcass joins the food streaming into the pot that boils on the left of the spread (Figure 3).

The final star included in Te Paa's story is Pōhutukawa (Sterope), the star associated with death (4). Matamua (2017b) explains that Matariki, the star, is positioned on the prow of Te Waka o Rangi, a celestial canoe that travels through the night sky (Figure 4). Each night, Taramainuku, the captain of the vessel, 'casts his net across the earth and hauls to the sky all those who have died that day' (Matamua 2017b, 63). When Matariki, the constellation, rises in the New Year, 'Taramainuku gathers the spirits of the year from the stern of his canoe and casts them into the heavens to become stars' (p.64).

(4) 'Te Waka o Rangi has a captain, by the name of Taramainuku.
He captures the spirits of passed loved ones, keeps them safe with him on his canoe'.
'When Matariki appears before sunrise and the Tangaroa moon shines so bright,
we call out the names of our loved ones; Taramainuku sends them into the night'.

Between one Matariki and the next, we learn that Koro has passed away. With Matariki rapidly approaching, the young boy tries to honour his grandfather's memory by following his teachings.

Figure 3. *Illustration depicting the hautapu, ceremonial feast, comprising foods to sustain the stars of Matariki.* Text © Brianne Te Paa. Illustrations © Story Hemi-Morehouse. Used with permission.

Figure 4. *Illustration of Te Waka o Rangi, the celestial canoe, and its captain Taramainuku, who gathers the spirits of the dead. Matariki, the star, is shown as the largest star of the cluster, and Pōhutukawa, the star of the dead, is positioned on the prow of the canoe.* Text © Brianne Te Paa. Illustrations © Story Hemi-Morehouse. Used with permission.

He seeks help from each of his family members to prepare the hautapu. He tells them of the significance of Matariki, and the tikanga or cultural practice of calling the names of the dead to Pōhutukawa on the prow of Te waka o Rangi, so that their spirits may be released by the canoe's captain Taramainuku, to adorn the night sky (5).

(5) 'But actually, Mum', I finished, 'the most important tikanga by far,
is to call Koro's name to Pōhutukawa so Taramainuku can make him a star'.

Maramataka – the Māori lunar calendar

The second salient semantic domain is the Maramataka – the Māori lunar calendar. The timing of the Matariki celebration is determined by the Maramataka. Each night of the lunar cycle is separately named in te ao Māori, and each full cycle is named as a lunar month. In *My Koro*, Te Paa includes terminology from the Maramataka, locating Matariki within the lunar month of Pipiri, generally corresponding to June, and the lunar phase of Tangaroa, in the opening lines of the story (6):

(6) Before sunrise one Pipiri morning, with the moon in its Tangaroa phase,
I sat with Koro on a maunga, to the east we directed our gaze.

The accompanying text and illustration support the reader to understand the meanings of the Māori words. Koro, pictured as an elderly man with grey hair and glasses, sits with a young boy beside a fire. Both are dressed for winter, with Koro wearing a felted woollen bush shirt (an outer layer of clothing commonly worn in rural Aotearoa), and the boy wearing a knitted hat and hooded jacket. In the top left of the spread, a moon in the third quarter hangs in the sky and on the right, the stars of Matariki shine. Steam from a cooking pot resting on the fire drifts towards the Matariki stars, visually foregrounding the hautapu ritual, and contrasting sharply with the cold darkness of the night sky. Fog swirls below the top of the maunga, mountain,

Figure 5. *The first spread of* How my Koro became a Star*, depicting the importance of the Maramataka during the rising of Matariki.* Text © Brianne Te Paa. Illustrations © Story Hemi-Morehouse. Used with permission.

where the two characters sit. Although we are not explicitly taught the meaning of Pipiri, when Te Paa composed her poem, we were approaching the first national observance of Matariki on 24 June, 2022. The temporal information in 'Before sunrise one Pipiri morning' allows the reader to infer that Pipiri names a period of time; the warm clothing, fire, and hot steam contrast with the clear night sky and fog, indicating that it is winter. The reader learns that Tangaroa names a particular phase of the lunar cycle, and can observe that phase in the illustrated moon (Figure 5).

We next encounter the Maramataka when the young boy realises he must prepare for Matariki alone, following the death of his koro. His first thought is to check the moon phase, and he is illustrated looking anxiously out his bedroom window at the night sky. Early in the story, the importance of moon phases is introduced with 'the moon in its Tangaroa phase' (6); later 'moon' is replaced by 'marama' (7).

(7) I didn't have time to be sad, though, as I anxiously looked at the moon.
I had to get on and prepare things – the marama would be in Tangaroa soon.

After gathering the ingredients for the Matariki hautapu or feast, the boy tries to convince his family to join him on the hilltop before dawn. His sister declines, prompting the boy to lament that, 'It's already Korekore Whakapiri' as he peers out the kitchen window. Again, we are not taught the precise meaning of Korekore Whakapiri, but we can infer that it refers to a phase of time close to the time when Matariki is celebrated.

The young boy finally engages his family's attention and he is able to explain the cultural significance of Matariki. The family goes out before dawn to view the Matariki cluster. Te Paa returns us to her opening line, reminding us that Matariki is observed from the first day of the Tangaroa phase, Tangaroa-ā-mua, in the month of Pipiri (8).

(8) Before sunrise one Pipiri morning, with the Tangaroa-ā-mua moon above,
we called out Koro's name to the stars and farewelled him with all of our love.

Whānau – family

The third semantic domain of significance to Te Paa's story is whānau, family. This semantic domain is of central importance to the celebration of Matariki, when deceased kin are farewelled by the gathered family. Te Paa's characters almost all use Māori kin terms to address each other. Each time a kin term is included in the story, the accompanying illustration depicts the relationship between the two characters. The reciprocal terms used by the boy's grandfather and the young boy are 'koro' and 'e moko'. Firstly, we establish that the older man is the boy's koro or grandfather (9).

(9) I sat with Koro on a maunga …
He taught me the name of each star

The illustration that accompanies these lines shows a child seated by a smiling older man (Figure 6). He, Koro, teaches the child as they sit together watching Matariki rise. The relationship between the older man and the child highlights the importance of intergenerational knowledge transmission in te ao Māori, through storytelling and through cultural practices and customs.

Later, Koro grieves and 'he called out my dear uncle's name', reinforcing the kin relationship between the characters, and allowing us to infer that they are grandfather and grandson. The kinship expression 'e moko' is then used by Koro to address his grandson (10). The illustration shows the same elderly man, whose eyes are now closed as he weeps. The kinship phrase 'e moko' includes the required personal vocative particle 'e', which introduces an address term comprising one long or two short vowels (Morefield 2003–2025, e).

(10) I looked at Koro with his sad eyes as his tears continued to fall.
'Listen carefully, e moko', he told me …

As the next Matariki approaches, the main character asks his family members for ingredients to cook the Matariki feast. He uses English terms to address his mother and father first (11). The

Figure 6. *Illustration depicting the relationship between Koro and his grandson.* Illustration © Story Hemi-Morehouse. Used with permission.

Figure 7. *Illustrations depicting Mum, Dad, tuakana (older same-sex sibling) and tuahine (boy's older sister).* Illustrations © Story Hemi-Morehouse. Used with permission.

accompanying illustrations show the boy speaking to his mother in the kitchen, and then his father outside the home. Both mother and father are engaged in domestic activities (Figure 7).

(11) a. 'Mum, can I please have a kūmara?'
b. 'Hey Dad – I know that you're hungry … '

These English terms are followed by two Māori terms for siblings. The young boy addresses one of his older siblings as 'tuakana'.[7] That character is assigned the pronoun 'he' (12a). He addresses his other sibling as 'tuahine'.[8] His tuahine is assigned the pronoun 'she' (12b). The illustration accompanying 'tuakana' shows the boy looking up at an older boy, who is exploring the attic, looking at a guitar amongst boxes, photographs and letters. The illustration accompanying 'tuahine' shows the boy speaking to an older girl, who is standing in front of an open fridge in the family kitchen (Figure 7).

(12) a. 'Tuakana, can you please come with me?' …
'Okay', he said with a frown.
b. 'Tuahine, can you please help me?' …
She handed me some from the fridge

While the boy's grandfather addresses him as 'e moko', the main character's parents and his older siblings all address him as 'e tama', again using the personal particle that combines with terms of address. We observe this pattern of address as our main character approaches each of his family members and asks them to take him up the mountain at Matariki (13):

(13) a. *Older sister to younger brother:*
'Sorry, e tama', said my sister.
b. *Older brother to younger brother, illustrated prone on bed in a dark room, with head turned away from his brother who stands in the bedroom doorway:*
'Bro, will you take me up the maunga?' I asked, as I started to feel quite sad.
'Kāo, e tama, don't be hōhā', he said.[9]
c. *Father to youngest son:*
'I'm a little busy, e tama', Dad said.
d. *Mother to youngest son:*
Mum looked at me strangely and said in reply, 'E tama, I don't understand'.

In the examples in (13), 'e tama' is used by an older family member towards a younger boy. For parents, it is the equivalent of calling a boy 'son'; for siblings it is the equivalent of calling a boy 'little brother'. In addressing our protagonist as 'e tama', the family positions him as the younger boy of the household, unable to make demands of his parents and older siblings. He must overcome this power dynamic in order to gain his family's cooperation in honouring his grandfather at Matariki.

As the story nears its end, the main character is joined by his family, and the Māori word for family, whānau, appears in the running text (14). In the illustration, the boy is pictured through the kitchen window, surrounded by his family members.

(14) By now my whole whānau had gathered, and I knew from the tears in their eyes, that we'd all be climbing the maunga, to see Matariki in the wakening sky.

Figure 8. *The whānau gather to view Matariki's rising, and to farewell Koro.* Text © Brianne Te Paa. Illustrations © Story Hemi-Morehouse. Used with permission.

The story ends with the whānau climbing the maunga together to view Matariki, and to farewell Koro, following the tradition that Koro had taught to his youngest grandson (Figure 8).

Discussion

Our close examination of the ways in which Māori is woven into the translingual text in *How my Koro became a Star* has provided evidence of the capacity of picturebooks to offer a visible and tangible expression of te reo Māori, an Indigenous language, and a culture that has historically been underrepresented in children's literature. Extending methods conventionally used in linguistic research to explore contact between two languages (Haspelmath and Tadmor 2009), we have identified three Indigenous semantic domains of significance. By adding visual analysis, we have explored and documented the range of ways in which readers unfamiliar with any lexical items have been supported to make meaning.

In the text, the author, Te Paa, moves the reader from the known to the unknown, and from the more familiar to the less familiar. For example, she moves from 'moon' to the Māori equivalent 'marama'; from the English kin terms 'mum' and 'dad' to the Māori kin terms 'tuakana' and 'tuahine'. In a move away from the linguistic analysis of te reo Māori as loanwords, being borrowed by English speakers (cf. Hay, Maclagan, and Gordon 2008), we have shown how storytellers like Te Paa and Hemi-Morehouse weave Māori language together with English, supporting reader comprehension of Māori vocabulary and cultural meanings through embedded illustrations and explanations (cf. Barbour, Daly, and Wessels 2025). The comprehension of new words is supported both through the running text, and through illustrations which depict a meaningful cultural practice and a set of beliefs and understandings. We understand the resulting translingual text as functioning to support all Māori language learners, and in particular, learners who identify as Māori and who have been denied access to their heritage language.

As noted, in our analysis of *My Koro*, we have identified three semantic domains around which Māori vocabulary and expressions cluster. These domains are Matariki, the Maramataka and Whānau. The carefully chosen Māori words represent a significant part, although not all, of complex

systems of cultural meaning in each domain. As readers encounter vocabulary within the key domains, there is the potential for them to build their knowledge of te ao Māori, the Māori world, through te reo Māori, the Māori language, as has been shown to occur in previous research concerning young children, their parents, and dual language picturebooks (Brouwer and Daly 2022, 2023).

Ultimately, the marriage of text and illustration in *My Koro* offers an example of the affordances of picturebooks using both linguistic and visual techniques to support Indigenous language and cultural reclamation (Smith and Pryor 2022). The running text and illustrations depict a meaningful cultural practice and associated beliefs and understandings. The Māori vocabulary that is included, and the accompanying illustrations, enable readers to either see their world reflected in the story, or to gain insight into an unfamiliar cultural practice. With a public holiday now marking the occasion, knowledge of Matariki as a celebration of the New Year in the Southern Hemisphere's winter is important for all New Zealanders; but understanding the cultural significances behind Matariki are of particular importance for readers and their whānau who identify as Māori. For many Māori, translingual picturebooks like *My Koro* offer a doorway into te ao Māori.

My Koro can be seen as a progression from earlier picturebooks featuring Māori themes. Rather than supplying readers with direct translations of Māori words in the running text and an accompanying glossary – a strategy found in earlier picturebooks – the readers are positioned as being capable of using both visual and textual content to infer meanings of possibly unfamiliar words. Not only that, readers are assumed to be invested in learning about Matariki, the celebration, as a practice for modern times. *My Koro* thus has the potential to serve as a starting point for curious readers, opening a doorway to te ao Māori beyond the picturebook, that readers may choose to step through. This reader-positioning is one of respect, as discussed by Short and Daly (2025) regarding five translingual picturebooks in their research:

> [The authors] recognise that, in their daily lives, children are constantly surrounded by situations in which they use context to understand what is happening, and that includes the presence of multiple languages. Instead of believing that young children will be confused by the integration of multiple languages, the creators of these picturebooks reflect the realities of children's worlds, where making sense occurs through visual and verbal clues. (Short and Daly 2025, 41)

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored in detail the visible and tangible linguistic diversity present in a 2022 picturebook created by an Indigenous Māori team, including a Māori author, illustrator and publisher, HUIA. We have introduced a methodology for researching the relationship between languages in a translingual picturebook, in this case featuring an Indigenous language, te reo Māori, and a colonial language, English. In a move away from the linguistic analysis of te reo Māori being borrowed by English speakers (cf. Hay, Maclagan, and Gordon 2008), we consider how storytellers like Te Paa and illustrator Hemi-Morehouse weave Māori language together with English, in a translingual practice which supports reader comprehension of Māori vocabulary and cultural meanings through embedded illustrations and textual clues (cf. Barbour, Daly, and Wessels 2022). We note the particular importance of translingual resources for readers who identify as Māori but who have been denied access to their heritage language. Far from being a simple form of entertainment for a child, *How my Koro became a Star* (Te Paa 2022a) is a sophisticated example of a cultural artefact that represents a minoritised Indigenous identity as it reclaims a central place within the contemporary national context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Within its pages, it both reflects, and seeks to teach and inform the curious reader of the complexity, value, and beauty of an age-old tradition to mourn death and celebrate life.

Notes

1. Professor Rangi Matamua (Tūhoe) is the author of *Matariki: te whetū tapu o te tau* (2017a) and the English edition *Matariki: the star of the year* (Matamua 2017b). He went on to develop the website *Living by the Stars* (2025) (https://livingbythestars.co.nz). Matamua's scholarship around Matariki was instrumental in establishing Matariki as a public holiday. He was named New Zealander of the year in 2023.
2. As well as composing the poem *How my Koro became a Star* (Wikaire-Lewis 2022), Brianne Te Paa (Ngāti Kahu, Ngā Puhi, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Whātua, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki, Te Whānau-a-Apanui) is a Deputy Principal at Kaipara College (Kaipara College n.d.), a secondary school located in Helensville north of the city of Auckland, which caters to students from Year 9 to Year 13.
3. Illustrator Story Hemi-Morehouse (Ngāti Koata, Ngāti Toa Rangatira) is from Aotearoa but was raised in Australia, where she now lives. Her work is inspired by her memories of Aotearoa, and her desire to reconnect with her ancestry, although she is also influenced by cartoon and graphic novel art styles. (See: Fiazi (2023) https://www.thesapling.co.nz/interview-story-hemi-morehouse/)
4. *How my Koro became a Star* was named on the Storylines Notable Book List of 2022, and won the Best Children's Book NZ Booklovers Awards in 2023. The Māori edition *Kua Whetūrangitia a Koro* won the Storylines Te Kahurangi Kāterina Te Heikōkō Mataira Award in 2023, and the Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu Award in 2023. (See: Huia Publishers (n.d.) https://huia.co.nz/products/how-my-koro-became-a-star?srsltid=AfmBOooQsVGoj26tmQ8Mgq39z0AHy-IVD3RoXkTVSBNsIVpAdCSiSvbm)
5. The running text of *My Koro*, including text on the front and back covers, but excluding internal title pages and the copyright page, is a total of 906 words. Counting each Māori word written separately as one word, we calculate the rate of Māori lexemes in the total word count as 91/906 or 10/1000.
6. Te Waka o Rangi 'the canoe of Rangi' is a celestial vessel visualised over the constellation of Pleiades.
7. Tuakana is the term used for an older same-sex sibling or cousin. The sex of the person addressed as tuakana depends on the sex of the person who is addressing them: a boy addresses his older brother as tuakana; and a girl would address her older sister as tuakana. This term is paired with teina (not used in the story), which is used for a younger same-sex sibling or cousin.
8. Tuahine is the term used by a boy to address his sister or female cousins. The corresponding term that girls use for their brothers and male cousins is tungāne (not used in the story).
9. The main character's older brother says, 'Kāo, e tama', 'No, little brother'; 'don't be hōhā', 'don't be annoying'.

Acknowledgements

This article has come about through a collaboration between academics at Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato University of Waikato, our colleague Dr. Darryn Joseph, and HUIA. We acknowledge research funding from Te Apārangi Royal Society of New Zealand's Marsden Fund, that has made our collaboration possible. We also acknowledge the creativity of author Brianne Te Paa and the artistry of Story Hemi-Morehouse, whose words and illustrations are featured in our article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Royal Society Te Apārangi Marsden Fund Grant UOW2308 Picturebooks in Aotearoa: The design and content of picturebooks reflecting indigenous language, culture and evolving national identities

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