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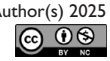

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# New Zealand English and Te Reo Māori: A critical perspective on the loanword narrative using data from translingual picturebooks

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## Abstract

**Aims/Purpose:** New Zealand English has been characterised by the use of vocabulary 'borrowed' from the Indigenous Māori language since early contact between English and Māori speakers. In this paper, we consider the relevance of the 'loanword narrative' to New Zealand English, examining data from translingual picturebooks published in Aotearoa New Zealand.
**Design/Data:** We built a small corpus of 10 translingual picturebooks spanning a 30-year period beginning in the early years of Māori language revitalisation.
**Analysis:** We applied techniques of language analysis from descriptive linguistics, including studies of loanwords.
**Findings:** We find some evidence of linguistic 'borrowing'.
**Originality:** However, in texts created by Māori content creators, with Māori cultural themes, a language practice akin to pedagogical code-switching or pedagogical translanguaging is observed. Māori content creators alternate between languages, treating Māori lexemes as distinct from NZE, preserving Māori orthographic traditions, and providing translation, explanation, or contextual support of Māori lexemes for NZE reader comprehension. Our observations find parallels in translanguaging studies in bilingual early childhood settings, and they are supported by new psycholinguistic research that has identified the development of substantial body of linguistic knowledge about the Māori language by non-Māori speakers through societal exposure.
**Significance:** We argue that the prevailing loanword narrative does not account for Māori language usage in translingual picturebooks developed by Māori content creators. Rather, we find a clear pattern of differentiation between Māori and NZE.

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## Introduction

In this article, we critique the prevailing loanword narrative that has been used to account for the use of Māori vocabulary by speakers of New Zealand English [NZE]. We analyse data from picturebooks published in Aotearoa, which provide evidence of language contact between te reo Māori (the Māori language [trM]) and NZE. Our interest in picturebooks stems from their pivotal role in forming children's language attitudes and contributing to their linguistic repertoire (Daly, 2009, 2018, 2019). In their combination of text and illustration, picturebooks are inherently multimedia forms of storytelling: the writing, illustration, and design of these cultural artefacts is complex, requiring careful planning. When more than one language is incorporated into the text (a translingual picturebook),[1] authors and publishers make complex decisions regarding how these languages will be positioned and interwoven, reflecting the motivations and language backgrounds of the book creators themselves (Daly, 2020; Vanderschantz & Daly, 2023).

There has not been a great deal of research focusing on translingual picturebooks, although a study of five translingual picturebooks by Short and Daly (2025) examines ways in which these picturebooks resist the message of the dominant language (English) as a norm. In our study, we examine the interaction between NZE and trM in a small corpus of translingual picturebooks. We identify two categories of picturebooks: first, there are picturebooks written in NZE for an English readership that do not foreground Māori themes or identities. These books provide limited evidence of the interaction between the two languages. Second, there are dual-language picturebooks, written predominantly in NZE, for an English language readership, but including language and cultural content that is sourced from trM and te ao Māori (the Māori world). These picturebooks provide substantial evidence of interaction between the two languages, and it is here that we focus our attention, examining the presentation of language and meaning. We consider whether these picturebooks provide support for the prevailing loanword narrative, and conclude that an alternative explanation, that of pedagogical translanguaging (and its predecessor pedagogical code-switching), better accounts for the interaction between the languages, and the language practices of picturebook content creators.

## Context

The context in which this research takes place is Aotearoa, a country of considerable linguistic diversity (Royal Society of New Zealand, 2013). Te reo Māori is the Indigenous language of Aotearoa, made an official language by the Māori Language Act 1987. The second official language is New Zealand Sign Language, made official by the New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006. English, the language of the majority of settlers in Aotearoa in the latter half of the 19th century, does not have legal status at the time of writing, but it is the most commonly used language in Aotearoa, with 90% of the population designating it a language that they speak (Ministry of Ethnic Communities, 2021).

When European settlers first arrived in Aotearoa in the early nineteenth century, Māori worked with missionaries to develop an orthography for their traditionally oral language. The orthography was adopted with alacrity, leading to Māori having higher literacy levels than Pākehā (New Zealand European) in early colonial times (Derby, 2021). Colonisation had a lasting impact on the Māori

language and people, with the number of Māori speakers dwindling through the 20th century. Crucially, Māori parents were advised that it was better for their children to use English, and Māori children were physically punished at school for using their home language (Hoskins et al., 2020).

Much of the Māori vocabulary that remained in usage was anglicised. Two of the authors of this paper, Julie Barbour and Nicola Daly, were both in New Zealand primary schools in the 1970s, and were unaware that the anglicised [tɑe.ˈhɕɯ] 'wait, slow down' derived from Māori [ˈtai.ho.a] 'wait', or that 'puckeroo' [ˌpɐ:.kɔ.ˈɹɯ] 'broken' derived from Māori [ˈpa.ka.ɾu] 'smashed, shattered, broken'. Many placenames were also anglicised, including Lake Taupo, pronounced [ˈtæo.pɕɯ] (rather than [ˈtau.po:]) and [ˌpæ.ɹɔ.pɔ.ˈɹæm] for Paraparaumu [ˈpa.ɾa.pa.ɾa.u.mu]. During the 1970s, a groundswell of activism grew to prevent what was beginning to look like the inevitable loss of trM, and the absorption of its lexicon into NZE. A petition for the language to be taught in schools was delivered to parliament in 1972 (Keane, 2023). Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi), signed in 1840 by the British Crown and Māori (Orange, 2023), was legally recognised in the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975. This led to the 'Te Reo Māori Claim' (Wai11) to the Waitangi Tribunal (1986). The Waitangi Tribunal found that trM was a taonga, or treasured possession, of the Māori people, and that it was the responsibility of the Government of Aotearoa to protect and foster the language. This responsibility was passed into law through the Māori Language Act 1987, later reformulated as Te Ture mō Te Reo Māori 2016.

Subsequently, Aotearoa has entered into an intensive period of language revitalisation. Deverson (1984, 1991) observes the tension between the anglicisation of Māori, and the preservation and maintenance of Māori pronunciation. He comments that

> at the present time there is noticeable resistance to the Anglicisation of Maori loan-words, and this directly reflects the current sociopolitical situation in New Zealand . . . the use of Maori in English should respect the integrity and current status of the language and its value to all New Zealanders. (Deverson, 1991, p. 22)

Children growing up in Aotearoa today are introduced to trM through the formal education system, and there is an expectation that Indigenous names of people and places will be pronounced according to Māori phonological principles (Keegan, 2024).

While the population of Māori speakers is now on the rise, only 7.9% the overall proportion of the population of Aotearoa self-reports being able to speak trM 'at least fairly well' (Stats, 2022b). This percentage includes both Māori and non-Māori, and it equates to approximately 400,000 people within Aotearoa's population of 5.12 million (Stats, 2022a). Lane (2024) estimated that approximate 115,000 individuals identifying as Māori by ethinicity were 'more proficient speakers' of the language. This figure includes both first and second language speakers and represents just under 15% of the Māori population living in Aotearoa in 2018 (Stats, 2018). Aotearoa remains a long way from proficiency levels of the pre-colonisation era, when 100% of the population was Māori speaking.

## The 'loanword' narrative

The interplay between English and te reo Māori reflects interactions between the Indigenous people and settlers since the nineteenth century. Aside from distinctive vowels resulting from the Great New Zealand Vowel Shift (Hay et al., 2008), the most salient characteristic of NZE today is the use of Māori words by NZE speakers (see, for example, Deverson, 1984; Gordon & Deverson, 1985, 1989; Macalister, 2005). Macalister (2008), testing passive knowledge of te reo Māori vocabulary, estimated that young New Zealanders know on average between 70 and 80 Māori words (in addition to proper nouns). New research on the active knowledge of non-Māori-speakers by Oh et al. (2023, p. 13) has found that 'the average New Zealander can define about 70 words'. Both

Macalister (2008) and Oh et al. (2023) tested a closed set of lexical items from te reo Māori. The growing enrolments in te reo Māori language courses over the past decade (Education Counts, 2023) indicate the growth of NZE speakers who have substantially larger Māori vocabularies.

An extensive literature describes vocabulary of Māori origin found in NZE (see, for example, Andersen, 1946; Bellett, 1995; de Bres, 2006; Deverson, 1984, 1991; Grant, 2012; Hay et al., 2008; Macalister, 2004, 2006, 2005, 2008). Gordon (2008, p. 61) describes the 'interchange' between the Māori and English languages as 'the story of the relationship between two peoples', with migrants to Aotearoa needing a vocabulary to describe unfamiliar flora, fauna and cultural items. She notes that as soon as Māori people were outnumbered by Pākehā in about 1860, the 'borrowing' of new vocabulary ceased, a situation which continued until revitalisation efforts in the 1970s, when the use of new Māori words woven into English began again.

Haspelmath (2009, p. 42), writing on loanwords in an international context, points out that when words from one language are borrowed into another, they will likely 'undergo changes to make them fit better into the recipient language'. Such changes can affect phonology, orthography, morphology, and/or syntax. In English, there is vocabulary originating in Latin, Greek, Celtic languages, Scandinavian languages, French, other modern Romance languages, German, and Indo-Iranian languages (Algeo & Butcher, 2014, p. 275ff.), among others. Speakers of English today are generally not aware of the etymologies of such words. New generations of English speakers simply learn these words as English. The loanword narrative assumes that Māori vocabulary is following the same pathway, integrating into the larger NZE lexicon. In this paper, we challenge that assumption.

## Picturebooks and the loanword narrative

The use of Māori 'loanwords' in NZE picturebooks was first studied by Daly (2007), who found a higher frequency of Māori words in 13 picturebooks published by Huia Publishers, compared to the frequency of Māori words in predominantly English texts such as newspapers and the Hansard records (Macalister, 1999, 2004). Daly (2007) concludes that the higher frequency of Māori words is likely to increase readers' familiarity Māori vocabulary, as well as motivating children to engage with books that may reflect their linguistic identity. Ten Pākehā parents shared picturebooks containing Māori content with their preschool children across a month, reporting effects on their use of Māori words, and increased knowledge of tikanga Māori (Māori cultural practices) related to the stories being read (Daly, 2008, 2009).

In our new research, we consider whether the loanword narrative remains relevant to the study of NZE employed in picturebooks written, illustrated, and published in Aotearoa. We find some evidence of vocabulary that originates from trM and undergoes transformation to become NZE (cf. Haspelmath, 2009). We present two examples, both from picturebooks written in NZE for an English readership. These particular picturebooks have been selected due to the non-Māori identities of their authors and illustrators, as well as the non-Māori themes presented in the texts.

### *The case of old Hu-Hu*

The Māori lexeme huhu is the name of the larval form of an insect (*Prionoplus reticularis*). This lexeme occurs in the picturebook *Old Hu-Hu* (Mewburn, 2009). There are no other Māori lexemes in the book. Old Hu-Hu and Hu-Hu-Tu (presumably deriving from huhu and the English numeral two) are the main characters in the story: Old Hu-Hu dies at the beginning of the book; young Hu-Hu-Tu reflects on the meaning of life and death as the story unfolds. The Māori word huhu is capitalised to reflect its repurposing as a proper name. The syllables are hyphenated, similarly to

the way that names like Billy-Bob or Mary-Lou are written in English. There is a semantic extension from huhu in trM, used to refer to the grub or larval form of the insect, to Hu-Hu in English, naming a character with the adult beetle form of the insect. NZE speakers talk about both huhu grubs and huhu beetles; in trM, terms for the grub differ from terms for the beetle. A range of expressions are used to refer to the beetle, including pepe (in author Kanauhea Wessels' dialect), pepe te muimui and tunga rere (Moorfield 2003-2025: tunga rere, pepe te muimui).

### *The case of Jim's letters*

Another example is the Māori word tūī, which occurs in *Jim's Letters* (Harper, 2014) in an address written on envelopes and letters that form the narrative. In *Jim's Letters*, we follow the story of two brothers, one of whom was a soldier who fought at Gallipoli (Turkey) in the First World War. The word tūī occurs in the place name 'Tui Farm', where the brothers were born. Tūī, a common noun like huhu, is the name of a kind of bird (the parson bird, *Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*). In *Jim's Letters*, tūī is capitalised as a proper name. Combined with 'Farm', it names a place. Other Māori lexemes also occur in *Jim's Letters*, although these are limited to the fine print of newspaper sheets that make up the background to one of the spreads in the story.

### *Summary*

In the examples of huhu and tūī, two words of Māori origin have been used by writers of NZE, and transformed into English through changes to Māori typographic conventions and meaning. Neither word is translated for the reader. In this analysis, Hu-Hu and Tui can be considered 'loanwords', integrated into a NZE text. While *Old Hu-Hu* and *Jim's Letters* are thematically tied to Aotearoa, the content of these books does not represent cultural themes from te ao Māori (the Māori world); nor is there any evidence that the content creators are foregrounding Māori identities.

We now consider the use of trM in picturebooks that involve Māori content creators.

## Picturebooks that foreground Māori themes and identities

In this section, we examine the interaction between NZE and trM in picturebooks with Māori cultural themes, created by teams that include people who identify as Māori. Older books in our sample are early exemplars of dual-language picturebooks, emerging in the first decades language revitalisation in Aotearoa; more recent books have either won or been shortlisted for New Zealand Book Awards. In the books selected, the treatment of words of Māori origin differs significantly from the treatment of the loanwords Tui and Hu-Hu.

### *Typographic conventions – the tohutō*

The key typographic distinction between trM and NZE is the use of the tohutō, the macron. While English makes no use of the macron as a typographic feature, the tohutō is employed systematically in standard Māori to represent contrastive long vowels, such that there are typographic contrasts between <a, e, i, o, u> and <ā, ē, ī, ō, ū>. In the previous section, we saw that the loanword Tui was an English representation of the Māori lexeme tūī, where both vowels take the tohutō. Daly's (2007, p. 29) study of NZE picturebooks led her to identify the importance of macrons in the representation of Māori vocabulary, commenting that 'macrons are necessary to make a distinction between phonemes in the borrowed item, to ensure their correct pronunciation, and to ensure the correct meaning of the word is applied'.

In a recent piece of research that is firmly positioned within the loanword narrative, Levendis and Calude (2019) explore a collection of strategies they describe as 'textual flagging' in a corpus of 290 NZE newspaper articles written between 2008 and 2017. The term 'flagging' is used by Levendis and Calude (2019, p. 2) to refer 'to the practice of marking the foreign origin of a word imported from another language'. In examples of types of flagging, Levendis and Calude (2019, p. 4, Table 3) illustrate the use of italics and quotation marks to typographically distinguish a Māori word as 'foreign' within NZE. They also observe that writers can flag loanwords by providing translations of those words in parentheses or dashes, or separated from the clause by commas. Levendis and Calude (2019) report an increase in use of Māori loanwords across the 10-year period, and a corresponding decrease in flagging in the same period; however, the use of tohutō as a category of flagging is not considered in their research.

Regarding translingual picturebooks, these differ according to whether Māori words are written with or without macrons. The earliest translingual books we have examined, *How Maui Slowed the Sun* (Gossage, 1982) and *Pukunui's Hangi* (Waerea, 1984) do not use macrons. There was likely less awareness of the role of macrons in making meaning in trM in that early period. By the 1990s, macrons appear more systematically in picturebooks such as *Roimata's Cloak* (Tamehana, 1995), which was published by Huia Publishers. Huia's policy to include tohutō in Māori words contrasts with the practices of international publishing houses, such as Penguin, where macrons have only recently begun to appear in translingual picturebooks.

When typing Māori words on standard keyboards, the writer includes tohutō by selecting a combining macron, by selecting a complex character with a macron, or by installing and enabling a Māori language keyboard. Even with a Māori language keyboard, keystrokes are required which are not used in NZE. It is thus a deliberate choice for writers to include tohutō, and where tohutū occur with Māori words, they explicitly signal the Māori identity of those words.

## *Making meanings available to readers*

In addition to the use of tohutō to signal that a word is Māori as opposed to NZE, we have found that picturebook content creators position trM vocabulary as distinct from NZE, making the meanings of Māori vocabulary (and larger structures) immediately available to readers. In this way, Māori language is accompanied by comprehension support for the non-Māori-speaking reader. In the books we have examined, these strategies only apply to trM. They are not otherwise employed to define or explain words or structures in the NZE texts.

*Providing literal translations.* The most explicit technique of conveying word meaning is to provide a literal translation. In some picturebooks, this is achieved by positioning the translation in parentheses, although such a technique is seldom seen in the running text of picturebooks. *How Maui slowed the sun* (Gossage, 1982) provides early examples in (1). Examples are bolded for the reader's convenience.

(1) a. They plaited **paraharaha (flat ropes), tuamaka (square ropes),** and round ropes.[iv]
b. Maui muttered a **here (charm)**.[iv]

The Māori vocabulary illustrated in (1) is not commonly known, and translations are needed for NZE readers to understand their meaning.

Content creators more commonly position a literal translation within commas, separating the translation from the rest of the clause. In (2a), the Māori lexeme occurs first; in (2b) the English lexeme occurs first; in (2c) the Māori lexeme is capitalised as a proper noun, and followed by a common noun translation.

(2) a. One day Roimata decided to visit **her kuia, her grandmother,** who lived at the foot of the mountain.[viii]
b. She made a sound like **the fantail, the tīrairaka**, which twitches its fan tail from side to side . . . [viii]
c. It wasn't long before **Tieke, the saddleback,** was flitting about in the trees.[i]

In (3a), the translation directly follows the Māori lexeme without intervening punctuation. Like Tieke in (2c) above, Ruru is capitalised as the proper name of a character, and it is translated with the species name 'morepork', referring to the small owl species *Ninox novaeseelandiae* (Moorfield, 2003-2025, ruru). Example (3b) shows the comparatively rare use of a dash to separate a translation from a Māori word in Drewery's (2004) *Koro's medicine.*

(3) a. . . . she saw **Ruru the morepork** dozing in the crook of a tree nearby.[i]
b. It's **rongoā – Māori medicine**.[ii]

In addition to intrasentential translations, some authors provide translation and further specification of lexemes intersententially. In (4a), kākahu is both translated as 'cloak' and further specified as being a particular kind of cloak, decorated with feathers of the kererū – a native wood pigeon with iridescent blue-green feathers (Powlesland, 2025). In (4b), the descriptive material presents the practice of rāhui from a child's perspective, explaining the ritual prohibitions which follow a death (see, for example, Charles Royal, 2025; Keane, 2011; Te Kotahitanga o Ngati Tuwharetoa, 2025). In (4c) the adjective 'cool' precedes the semantically equivalent Māori adjectival verb makariri. 'Cool' occurs in the narration of the story, while makariri is positioned in the direct speech of the story's protagonist, Pukunui, lending authenticity to his character.

(4) a. She wore her new feather **kākahu** which she wanted to show to her kuia. The kākahu was **a beautiful cloak made from kererū feathers**.[viii]
b. A **rāhui** was put on the beach. **We couldn't play there any more. Or fish. Or eat kina. Or swim.**[vii]
c. Kneeling at the edge of a **cool mountain stream**, Pukunui gathered smooth flat stones. 'Brrrrrr', he thought. 'The water is **makariri**'.[x]

We also observed examples of complete sentence structures, which occur systematically with sentential translations. In *Pukunui's Hangi* (Waerea, 1984), the characters in illustrations speak Māori, their words captured in speech bubbles; the running text provides translation into NZE (examples 5a-b). As noted for example (4c), the use of trM by Māori characters helps to create a sense of cultural authenticity in the picturebook.

(5) a. In illustration: 'E haere mai ana te manuhiri!!'
In running text: 'The visitors are coming!' he cried.[x]
b. In illustration: 'Kia ora. Ko Pukunui taku ingoa'.
In running text: 'Hello. My name is Pukunui', he said.[x]
c. In running text: The rāhui was over. *Kua hīkina te rāhui.*[vii]
d. In running text: But our love remains. *Ka mau tonu te aroha.*[vii]

In Szekely's (2011) *Rāhui*, italics are used to present translations of NZE structures in the running text (5c-d). The Māori clauses offer culturally appropriate phrasing which loosely translates and complements the NZE clauses. In (5c), the perfect passive voice is used for the Māori translation, literally 'The rāhui has been removed', while in (5c) 'our love' in the English clause is translated as 'the love', and *mau tonu'* translates more literally as 'still continues' or 'still holds firm'. Like the use of trM by characters in *Pukunui's Hangi* (Waerea, 1986), the culturally appropriate phrasing of the Māori clauses in *Rāhui* (Szekely, 2011) lends authenticity to the story being told.

*Supporting textual inference.* Clues are employed by picturebook content creators to support comprehension of Māori vocabulary through textual inference. Lexemes denoting Māori flora and fauna are regularly positioned as left-hand modifiers of right-hand heads in NZE. In such structures, the Māori lexemes designate the 'type' of entity which is being described by the NZE head. With the exception of miro berries, the relevant plants or creatures are depicted in accompanying illustrations.

(6) a. a ponga branch [x]
b. miro berries [viii]
c. a harakeke leaf [ii]
d. the ngaio tree [ii]
e. kererū feathers [viii]
f. huhu beetle [iii]

Textual clues can also be found in other structural elements that co-occur with Māori vocabulary. Examples below show how both semantic and grammatical properties of the accompanying vocabulary allow readers to infer the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

(7) a. It was a Tuesday when we buried Koro Jack in the **urupā**. [ix]
b. It wasn't long before **Tieke**, the saddleback, was flitting about in the trees . . . [i]

In (7a), the phrase 'buried Koro Jack' indicates a specific action that takes place in a specific physical location, encoded in the locational preposition phrase 'in the X', which designates urupā as X, the location in which the burial happens. The accompanying illustration displays mourners gathered in a graveyard. In (7b), the species tīeke 'Philestrunus caruncalatus' is translated into common English as 'the saddleback'. The tīeke is rare in Aotearoa, and the direct translation of saddleback may be insufficient to identify the tīeke as a kind of bird. The clause continues with the action 'flitting', associated with winged creatures, allowing the reader to infer the intended referent of tīeke as the bird in the accompanying illustration.

## *Summary*

In this section, we have presented evidence of the language practices of translingual picturebook content creators. In addition to the use of tohutō (macrons) to accurately represent trM phonology, content creators support reader comprehension by providing: (1) direct translations; (2) descriptive explanations; and (3) supportive clues, both textual and visual, to allow the reader to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words. Texts interact directly with illustrations, so that readers are regularly provided with a visual representation of the meanings being expressed. The strategies identified in

our work reveal a systematic language practice by picturebook content creators: Māori vocabulary and larger Māori structures are treated as distinct from NZE, and their meanings are deliberately made available to readers.

## Interpreting the language practices of translingual picturebook content creators

In reviewing the data that were examined for this study, the prevailing loanword narrative can successfully account for only some of the language practices of picturebook content creators. When content creators are not claiming a Māori identity or foregrounding Māori cultural themes, the use of vocabulary from trM most clearly demonstrates linguistic borrowing. In such picturebooks, Māori lexemes may undergo typographic and semantic changes, transforming into NZE words. The lexemes are not translated for the benefit of the reader, nor are they differentiated in any way from other English words. In contrast, where picturebook content creators claim a Māori identity, and foreground Māori themes, there is considerable evidence of a language practice whereby trM vocabulary (and larger structural units) is differentiated from English, both through the typographic convention of the tohutō to signal vowel length, and through the provision of meaning to support the reader's comprehension.

An alternative to the loanword narrative is to interpret the language practices of Māori content creators as involving code-switching. Muysken (2000) distinguishes between code-switching or 'alternations' between larger units of language, and intrasentential code-mixing. Intrasentential code-mixing may take the form of 'insertions' of word or phrasal structures from one language into another, or 'congruent lexicalization', where material from one language is placed within a matched syntactic structure from another (Muysken, 2000, p. 3). In our work, we employ the term 'code-switching' to cover both intrasentential and intersentential shifts. Both types of shifts are observed in the data presented in this paper.

While code-switching may appear an obvious interpretation of the data, such an approach has seldom been taken in the literature on language contact in Aotearoa. Gordon (2008, p. 67) does question whether the use of Māori words and phrases by NZE speakers should be considered 'borrowing' or code-switching. On the one hand, Gordon favours an analysis of borrowing; on the other, she notes increasing usage of trM by NZE speakers, particularly those of Māori ethnicity. Like Deverson (1984), Gordon (2008) identifies efforts made by NZE speakers to conform to Māori pronunciation norms when using Māori vocabulary (pp. 63–68). The increasing use of trM conforming to Māori rather than English pronunciation norms is suggestive code-switching rather than borrowing.

Code-switching behaviours are most often associated with fluently bilingual or multilingual speakers (see, for example, Gardner-Chloros, 2009, p. 4; Durkin, 2014, p. 10). The large numbers of non-Māori speakers in Aotearoa suggest that many readers of translingual picturebooks are unlikely to be fluently bilingual. Daly et al. (2023) have observed that translingual picturebooks may be intended for an English-speaking audience with an interest in the other language, although the language competencies of the reader will likely impact upon the choice of text. A fluently bilingual adult, reading to a child being raised as a speaker of trM, could well select a Māori language picturebook to read to their child, rather than an alternative dual-language (translingual or bilingual) edition.

We find parallels to the code-switching practices of picturebook content creators and their readers in the pedagogic practices of bilingual teachers, where students are being introduced to an additional language for content learning or language acquisition purposes. In such contexts,

pedagogical code-switching, and more recently, pedagogical translanguaging, has been observed. Pedagogical code-switching is associated with a number of different purposes, but one regularly identified purpose is code-switching by teachers to facilitate student comprehension through translation (see, for example, Fennema-Bloom, 2010; Guthrie, 1982; Merrit et al., 1992; Üstünel & Seedhouse, 2005).

A growing body of literature reframes code-switching behaviours as *translanguaging.* Translanguaging can be defined as 'the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages' (Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 283). Within classrooms, *pedagogical translanguaging* is understood to be a deliberate practice where teachers and their students switch between languages in planned learning activities (see, for example, Canagarajah, 2011; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017, 2020, 2021; Conteh, 2018). Seals et al.'s (2019) research has particular relevance to ours, focussing on translanguaging in bilingual early childhood settings, where trM is spoken along with English. Seals et al. (2019) report the presence of translanguaging across the full range of learning interactions and activities, with adults and children making use of both languages. Seals and Olsen-Reeder (2020) examine the deliberate introduction of dual-language print resources in contexts where either trM or the Samoan language are used alongside English. Their resource development is guided by a set of pedagogical translanguaging 'rules' that they generate from their analysis of translanguaging practices in education. The rules closely reflect the practices of the dual-language picturebook content creators reported in our study, including repetition of meaning, ensuring that content is provided in both languages, and allowing for switches to take place both within and between sentences/utterances (Seals & Olsen-Reeder, 2020, p. 5).

In Aotearoa, translingual picturebooks provide a vehicle for small amounts of trM vocabulary (and occasionally, larger language structures) to be introduced to non-Māori-speaking readers. In creating such translingual resources, it could be argued that picturebook creators are privileging the needs of monolingual NZE speakers (cf. Domke, 2018). In the context of Aotearoa however, given the identities of the content creators, and the small proportion of confident speakers of the Māori language within the population as a whole, we see these picturebooks as empowering NZE speakers of Māori descent, as well as the larger English-speaking population, to engage with trM.

## Beyond translingual picturebooks

There is evidence that the language practices we have identified in our analysis extend beyond picturebooks into other domains of written NZE. Dual-language signage, for example, is increasingly visible in Aotearoa. Schools in Kirikiriroa Hamilton display signs read both 'KURA' and 'SCHOOL'. The signage is found outside Māori-medium and English-medium schools alike.

A recent RNZ [Radio New Zealand] article discusses the unacknowledged use of Māori vocabulary by a French American brand of casual footwear, called Hoka (trM: to soar, fly) (Solomon, 2025). In the article, Solomon (2025) quotes Lynell Tuffery Huria as saying 'Te reo Māori is a taonga [treasure] . . . We need to start respecting it as that'; Solomon goes on to discuss a Hoka footwear style called arahi, another word of Māori origin, saying 'the meaning of ārahi is "to lead" and it can be a tapu (sacred) or noa (common) word in Māori . . . something that is common like a shoe should not be married with something sacred such as the word "ārahi"'. This article clearly foregrounds Māori themes, although Solomon herself does not identify as Māori.

In a *New Zealand Herald* article ('New Zealand creative blends te ao Māori with global design in new carpet range', 2025), a carpet range is described as being 'inspired by the harakeke (flax plant)'; the Māori designer Arnya Karaitiana is quoted as saying, 'at its core, te rito is the new

shoot, representing the tamariki [children]'. Like the article about Hoka shoes, this article foregrounds Māori themes and identities, although the identity of the author is not disclosed.

Returning to the education sector, in a *Northern Advocate* article about changes to a controversial school lunch programme, journalist Yolanda Tswanya (2025) refers to the programme as 'Ka Ora, Ka Ako Healthy School Lunch Programme'. The programme targets child poverty, not ethnicity. In referring to a leadership role, Tswanya (2025) writes 'Ministry of Education hautū (leader) operations and integration Sean Teddy said . . .'. Tswanya is South African in origin. She could have omitted the Māori words and phrases, but instead, she included them.

These brief contemporary examples show how the writing practices we have identified in dual-language picturebooks are present in other forms of written NZE. It is not only Māori authors writing about Māori themes who are creating dual-language texts in Aotearoa. These code-switching practices are being adopted by non-Māori as well. Where trM is included, writers ensure that their readers can access meaning.

## Evidence from psycholinguistic research of Māori language awareness

New psycholinguistic research also offers support for our claims that translingual picturebooks involve code-switching rather than vocabulary borrowing. Studies by Oh et al. (2020) and Panther et al. (2023) establish that non-Māori-speakers residing in Aotearoa have an awareness of trM, proposing that contextual exposure to Māori forms this awareness. Panther et al. observe that

> Māori vocabulary, as well as the use of Māori language, is pervasive in media, educational and cultural contexts in New Zealand. Māori expressions, including greetings, are largely and increasingly normalised. There are television stations and radio programs that broadcast in Māori, and in public buildings there is normally at least some Māori used or represented in writing. (Panther et al., 2023, p. 3)

Through a programme of psycholinguistic testing, Oh et al. (2020) and Panther et al. (2023) show that non-Māori speaking individuals demonstrate two key skills: '(a) Non-Māori speakers in New Zealand can discriminate [Māori] words from non-words; and (b) they are highly sensitive to Māori phonotactics' (p. 18). This means that non-Māori-speakers know when they are seeing or hearing Māori words. The capacity for Māori word recognition shown by non-Māori-speakers is reported to be as accurate as Māori word recognition demonstrated by bilingual Māori-NZE speakers, who recognise both the form and meaning of trM. Unsurprisingly, the use of the macron in experimental stimuli affects non-Māori speaker evaluations of prompts. This effect was reported by Panther et al. (2023, p. 9), who noted the tendency of non-Māori speakers 'to rate stimuli containing macrons as more Māori-like in Oh et al.'s (2020) study'.

Oh et al. (2020, Conclusion) describe the knowledge of non-Māori-speakers as feeding into a Māori proto-lexicon, which contains 'more than a thousand phonological sequences that recur with statistical regularity in the language'. This proto-lexicon is likened by Panther et al. (2023) to an infant's receptive knowledge of their care-giver's language, prior to their active production of language. The proto-lexicon allows NZE speakers to identify words as Māori or not, regardless of whether they speak the Māori language or not. This language knowledge is very different to the non-etymological knowledge that most NZE speakers have of loanwords incorporated into English from other languages.

Oh et al. (2020, Conclusion) speculate that 'there is potential for "awakening" the proto-lexicon of monolingual NZE speakers to more readily attach meanings to the words they [NZE speakers] already "know"'. Considering NZE readers of translingual texts, when these readers encounter

unfamiliar Māori words, they will be able to activate their proto-lexicon to identify a given word as being Māori, and they will be appropriately primed to associate that Māori word with its supplied meaning.

## Discussion and conclusion

Through our examination of translingual picturebooks in the context of Aotearoa, we have found some evidence of linguistic 'borrowing' of trM into NZE in picturebooks without a Māori thematic focus. Of considerably more interest, however, is our observation of a different kind of language practice in picturebooks created by Māori content creators, with Māori cultural themes. We have shown that trM is positioned as a distinct language, alongside NZE. In part this is achieved through the use of the tohutō, the macron, which is the sole typographic feature differentiating trM from English. Furthermore, the meanings of Māori vocabulary items and larger structures are made available to readers through direct translation, and/or contextual support to infer meaning, as was the case for translingual picturebooks featuring other combinations of languages examined by Short and Daly (2025).

The positioning of trM as a separate language is inherent in older models of code-switching, and it underpins newer understandings of translanguaging. Although older models have typically seen code-switching as a linguistic behaviour of fluent bilinguals, the behaviours of picturebook content creators find parallels in classroom settings, where teachers in particular move between languages for pedagogical purposes, to support the comprehension of their less-than-fluent students. We believe that Māori content creators are engaged in pedagogical code-switching, for the purpose of introducing trM to their non-Māori-speaking readers. Our observations of other forms of written communication in Aotearoa suggests that it is not only in translingual picturebooks, and not only Māori content creators who actively translanguaging. This is an area where more research is needed, particularly research that positions trM alongside NZE, and attributes at least some bilingual agency to its speakers.

Psycholinguistic research by Oh et al. (2020) and Panther et al. (2023) tells us that non-Māori speaking individuals in Aotearoa are able to identify Māori lexemes as being Māori, even if they do not understand the meanings of those lexemes. On encountering Māori language, NZE readers thus have the capacity to recognise trM as distinct from NZE, and they are well placed to make use of the support that is provided to them, to comprehend any unfamiliar words.

Until the Māori revitalisation movement gathered momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, the loanword narrative perhaps made sense as an explanation for the use of Māori vocabulary in NZE: such vocabulary was anglicised by many NZE speakers, and indeed, the origins of some Māori words were lost to NZE speakers. There was an extended period of time when it was thought that trM would simply die out. In the early 1990s, Benton commented with pessimism on efforts beginning in the 1970s to revitalise trM, saying:

> All these advances have not fully compensated for the damage done to the language by the schools over previous generations, and by the effects of all-English television and radio, the destruction of Māori communities by emigration intensified by government policy and economic necessity, and the other social forces ranged against the language for part or all of the twentieth century. (Benton, 1991, p. 17)

It is certainly the case that intergenerational language transmission has been disrupted by the myriad forces of colonisation; however, the Māori language has not become extinct. In the discourse surrounding contact between NZE and trM, it seems that the language practices of Māori-English bilinguals have been rendered invisible in favour of a sociolinguistic narrative of loanwords that has privileged the language of the English-speaking majority.

Today, there is an awareness in Aotearoa that the Māori vocabulary used by NZE speakers is Māori, not English. Translingual picturebooks provide evidence of treatment of trM as a distinct language from NZE. Such picturebooks offer learning opportunities for a non-Māori-speaking audience to grow their knowledge of trM, through exposure to the Māori language, and to the Māori world, through the foregrounding of Māori language, stories, and cultural themes. These learning opportunities have the potential to shape the language knowledge and attitudes of new generations of readers, reinforcing the understanding of Māori content creators that te reo Māori and New Zealand English are distinct. The evidence we have presented from translingual picturebooks and beyond may well reflect movement towards a bilingual future for more of Aotearoa's population.

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The data that have been observed and analysed in this work are publicly available.

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## Note

1. A translingual picturebook is a picturebook in which the text is predominantly in one language (e.g., English) with another language (e.g., the Māori language) woven in. It is one of three identified forms of dual-language picturebook: translingual; bilingual; and dual version (Daly, 2024, p. 34).

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