OVERHEARING TANGI, TANGAROA, AND TANIWHA: THE REPORTED EFFECTS OF MĀORI LOANWORDS IN CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS ON LANGUAGE USE AND CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE OF ADULT READERS

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Abstract

Studies show that children's literature can and does affect the language (Cunningham, 2002) and cultural awareness (Cullinan & Galda, 2002) of the children who have these books read to them. However, there have been no studies of the potential for written New Zealand English, in particular the use of Māori loanwords in children's picture books, to influence the language use of adults, nor the potential for children's picture books to affect the adults' knowledge of tikanga Māori. This paper will examine these questions by reporting on themes from semi-structured interviews with four parents after reading a set of 13 picture books which use a high frequency of Māori loanwords (Daly, 2007) to their children for a period of a month. Adult readers reported changes in both receptive and productive use of Māori loanwords used in the books, and increased knowledge of tikanga Māori.

1. Introduction

Children's literature is unusual, in that it is adults who decide what is written, praised, published and purchased. Thus children's books address two audiences: children and adults (O'Connel, 2006: 17). There is a substantial body of research examining the effect of children's books on the language use (for a review, see Cunningham, 2005) and cultural knowledge (for a discussion, see Cullinan & Galda, 2002) of children. However, as an adult who is a frequent reader of children's picture books I am very interested in the effect of this form of literature on adults' language use and cultural knowledge. It seems clear to me that there must be some effect. Certainly I am aware that I often choose books for my child which are on topics I would like to know more about. Inevitably this involves reading associated vocabulary, and these can be Māori loanwords. I am also aware of the effect of my own language use on my child's language use. If I am confident enough to use a new loanword, it is more likely that my daughter will also learn that item both through the reading of the books we share, but also through interactions with me. However, there appear to be no studies in this area.

In a review of the literature, Cunningham (2005) examines how exposure to written language leads to children's vocabulary development. She reviews several studies examining shared book reading (one adult reading to between one and several children) for children who are not yet independent readers which show that even a single reading of a book can contribute substantially to receptive vocabulary growth, although multiple exposure is needed for productive vocabulary growth. Cunningham (2005:57) claims that "[o]verall the results suggest that shared book reading is an important and independent mechanism in the development of vocabulary in young children". Thus it is quite possible that exposing children to the use of Māori loanwords in New Zealand English children's picture books will increase their receptive knowledge and even their expressive use of such words (after repeated readings), but does it also affect the vocabulary of the adults reading these books?

Many writers agree about the power of children's books to increase the cultural awareness of children being read to, although in fact it is difficult to find specific research studies of this area. Cullinan and Galda (2002) comment on the power of children's books to create a society in which people from diverse backgrounds are able to embrace commonly held values and to celebrate differences. In her discussion of the effect of children's literature on readers' identities, McVeagh (2003: 89) says that "what we read opens

up other people's worlds to us", and "they [the books] are helping to shape our cultural consciousness in positive ways" (McVeagh, 2003: 94). However, to date it appears that there is no specific literature discussing the effects of children's books on the cultural knowledge of the adult readers of children's books.

There are not many studies which examine the use of loanwords in children's picture books. An exception is a study by Barrera and Quiroa (2003) who examined the use of Spanish in Latino children's literature published in the US between 1995 and 2000 and noted that historically Spanish language has been added to English language texts for cultural flavour at best, at worst for stereotyping. Their conclusion from the examinations of the book in their corpus was that the use of carefully selected and well integrated terms can enhance the literary realism and cultural authenticity of a book, but that the selection of such terms can only be done by someone with cultural and linguistic knowledge, otherwise the book risks tokenism or superficiality. An earlier study by the author (Daly, 2007) examined the use and textual representation of Māori loanwords in a set of 13 books published in New Zealand English, and showed a much higher incidence of loanwords in these books (56 per thousand) than in other previously studied New Zealand English contexts.[1] However, in neither study is there consideration of the effect of the use of such loanwords on the vocabularies of those reading the books, nor their cultural knowledge.

The focus of this study then was to examine the effect of a set of New Zealand English children's picture books published between 1995 and 2005 on the language use and the cultural knowledge of the adults who read these books. Thus the aim was to answer the following questions:

1. How does reading children's picture books with high frequencies of Māori loanwords affect adult readers' use of these loanwords?
2. How does reading children's picture books with high frequencies of Māori loanwords affect adult readers' knowledge of tikanga Maori?

2. Method

Four parents were approached by networking amongst the parents of the author's daughter's kindergarten. Each parent was given a set of 13 New Zealand English children's picture books published by Huia Publishers

between 1995 and 2005 for a month. This was the same set of books examined in a previous study concerning the rate of use of Māori loanwords (Daly, 2007). The types used in these books are presented in Table 1 below.

The parents were asked to incorporate these books into their normal story reading times with their children. There was no compulsion to read every book, nor to read them every night. After a month the researcher arranged to interview the parents concerning using a semi-structured interview (see appendix) which included questions concerning their familiarity with te reo Māori. The use of the semi-structured interview for data collection was based on the knowledge that this tool allows participants the opportunity to present their own views in detail, and it allows the interviewer to pursue relevant emergent issues

Table 1: Types used in 13 New Zealand English Children's Picture Books published by Huia Publishers 1995–2005

TIKANGA MĀORI		FLORA AND FAUNA		PROPER NOUNS	
āe	rongoā	harakeke	ruru	Āniwaniwa	Ranginui
aroha	taihoa	ika	tī kouka	Hēmi	Rēinga
auē	tama	kākāriki	tīrairaka	Hinepūkohurangi	Roimata
awa	taniwha	kānuka	tūī	Karioi	Tama
hapū	tino pai	karaka	weka	Kewa	Tāne
haere mai	tīhei mauriora	kauri		Koro	Tangaroa
hīkoi	tohunga	koromiko		Māmā	Tangitu
iwi	tūpuna	kerurū		Manga-tai-Kapua	Te Urewera
kai	upoko	kiwi		Mangatū	Timo
kaitiaki	urupā	kōtuku		Māori	Tino Pai
kākahu	utu	kōwhai		Marama	Tūhoe
kia ora	waiata	kūkupa		Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga	Tuna
koro	waka	mako		Maungapōhatu	Tuputupu-roa
kuia	whānau	mānuka		Motuhoa	Tūranganui
manuhiri	whare	maunga		Pāpā	Tutu Pai
marae	wharekai	miro		Papatūānuku	Waipa
maunga		ngaio		Pou	Whatatutu
mokopuna		pōhutukawa		Puku Pai	Whirikoki
pono		pūriri		Rā	
pounamu		rimu		Rangi	

which may not have been included in the original interview schedule (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Previous studies of loanwords have been in corpus linguistics, and so this data collection method adds another dimension to research in the field of Māori loanwords in New Zealand English.

3. Participants

The four participants were female, ranging in age from 35 years to 42 years. While four participants is a relatively small number on which to base any generalisations, it was felt that this number was appropriate given the data collection method used, and it was intended that results from this study would guide future data collection. All four participants spoke English as their first language and described their ethnicity as either European or Scots European. Participant 1 (P1) had also learnt French and German at school for about five years. Participant 3 (P3) spoke some French, Spanish, Italian and British Sign Language, and Participant 4 (P4) spoke some French learnt at school. Two of the participants (P1 and P2) had spent most or all of their life in New Zealand, and the other two participants (P3 and P4) were from Britain. P3 had been in New Zealand for 15 years and P4 for 2 years. The four participants rather neatly form a gradation of time in New Zealand, ranging from all her life (P2) to most of her life (25 years, P1) to a substantial chunk of her adult life (15 years, P3), to a very brief recent period (2 years, P4).

All participants reported having learnt some te reo Māori either through a school setting (P1), or through a work setting (P2, P3, P4). P2 had learnt Māori pronunciation, a few greetings and some protocol for one hour after school for a week at a school at which she was teaching. P3 had learnt some Māori in her workplace and through her son who recently began attending primary school, and P4 had had a one-hour session at work concerning Māori protocol. She had also learnt some words from her work-related clients. The participants varied in the extent to which they reported that they altered their use of loanwords by situation. P1 reported that her use of loanwords did not differ by situation. P2 reported that her use of loanwords would increase in public settings where Māori were present, but that if she knew the English name for something she would be more likely to use that than the Māori equivalent, especially in the home. P3 reported she used loanwords in her 'general language' particularly when talking about trees or birds. P4 reported that she used more loanwords when speaking with her school-aged children. All participants reported

attending functions in which te reo Māori was used including events on marae (P1), church functions (P2), work functions and plays (P3), and work meetings (P4).

Thus in sum, three of the four female participants had exposure to additional languages, although none were fluent, and all four had some exposure to te reo Māori. This contact with te reo Māori would seem to be more than many other non-Maori New Zealanders. A Te Puni Kokiri telephone survey of language attitudes in 2006 indicated that 54% of non-Māori respondents had never learnt Māori (Te Puni Kokiri, 2006). The participants' above average exposure to te reo Maori will of course influence the findings in this study.

P1 had a 6 year old and a 3 year old girl and had read all of the thirteen books over the month, and some of them were read a couple of times. Participant 2 had a 6 year old and a 4 year old son and read from the set of 13 books about 3 times a week. Participant 3 had a 6 year old son and a 4 year old daughter and they read from the set every night during the month. Participant 4 had four children aged between 10 years and 3 years. She read the books one a night for the first two weeks of the month, then had a rest, and then returned to a few favourites.

4. Results and Discussion

Themes from the four semi-structured interviews which link to the two research questions will be summarised and discussed below.

4.1 Use of loanwords

Most of the participants initially reported that they did not observe themselves or their children using the loanwords from the books outside of the reading context. However, with a little probing, P2 reported that she might be more likely to stop and point out a kowhai tree for example: 'yeah it's easier now if you see a kowhai tree to stop and go, "Oh there's the kowhai tree like in the book"' (P2/7). It is noted that New Zealand English does not appear to have any other word for the kōwhai tree, and so this may simply be an example of increased saliency of a particular object due to having read a story about it, but ultimately this still leads to an increased use of a loanword. P1 noted that she felt that there was a change in receptive knowledge: 'And just 'cos they haven't used them, doesn't mean … that when we read a book again they will know what they are … you know, like they will recognise the words, rather

than having to say, "Oh what does that mean?"' (P1/4). P3 and her son had particularly enjoyed 'Taming the Taniwha' (Tipene, 2001), and had read it many times. P3 reported that she and her son had used the word *taniwha* more frequently since reading the book: 'so I have used taniwha quite a lot this week because we've been talking about the behaviour of people and I can say to him, "Perhaps they are just being a taniwha. Let's think how we would tame a taniwha." So I have been using that word quite a bit' (P3/6). P4 reported no change in use of loanwords and commented that she felt this would be unlikely after such a short period (one month), but she did report that the reading of the 13 books over the month meant that she would now more readily pick up children's books which used Māori loanword, which does suggest at least an increased interest in (and perhaps familiarity with) the words:

> 'But I have enjoyed … the sort of enforced reading of just Māori books [sic] and it probably would influence me when I went to the library. I'd probably pick up a book with Māori loanwords more readily perhaps than I would have before … had I not done this study.' (P4/7)

4.2 Adults modeling decoding

I asked the participants if they had any difficulty pronouncing any of the loanwords. P1 and P2, both having spent substantial parts (or all of) their lives in New Zealand, reported some difficulties with pronunciation. P1 reported having to have several attempts to pronounce some place names: 'I think it was a few place names that kind of had to have a couple of goes to get the intonation right' (P1/3). P2 reported that at times she did stumble and had to fall back on her previous lessons in pronunciation: 'and I was thinking, 'Gosh, I'm glad I know my Māori' … because probably if you didn't you'd just want to give up on it' (P2/6).

In both cases while employing these strategies, the participants were also indirectly modeling their personal phonological decoding strategies for their children, an essential skill for those learning to read (Pressley, 2006).

4.3 Children helping adults to pronounce unfamiliar loanwords

Another interesting comment by the two participants (P3 and P4) not born in New Zealand who reported having great difficulty with pronouncing many of the loanwords was that their children helped them with their pronunciation. This came up when I asked each of them how confident they were about reading the loanwords in the books, and they replied:

> 'Oh no, I was shocking! I wasn't terribly confident. I'd just give it a crack because I'm always good at that, and … but [son's name] helped … he could always correct me, and did … and enjoyed that.' (P3/6)

> 'Not at all … found it really difficult and I often had to ask my eight year old daughter who's got good …a good grasp of pronunciation. She's got the proper 'r' [flapped [r]] so she'll … she just says it right.' (P4/5)

I have not found any literature documenting such a phenomenon. There is a body of literature showing that in bilingual settings children often act as interpreters for their families (this is known as language brokering, see Morales & Hanson, 2005). In the current situation there are two regional dialects of English (British English and New Zealand English) and in a similar way, children are acting as translators of pronunciation for their parents between British English which uses very few Māori loanwords, and New Zealand English which uses many more, and increasingly so (Macalister, 1999, 2004, 2006).

4.4 Pick-up of books

An interesting and related aspect of the reading of loanwords were comments made by the participants about whether the use of loanwords would put them off reading a children's picture book. P1 and P3 reported that the use of loanwords would not put them off picking up books, while P2 reported that it probably would. As reported above, P4 said that the reading of the 13 books over the month meant that she would now more readily pick up children's picture books which used Māori loanwords. Participants did not give reasons for being put off (or not) picking up the books. However, it is interesting that the participants who were not born in New Zealand were the ones who reported being least resistant to picking up books for their children using loanwords. This is possibly because they had experienced making many adjustments, including new ways of using language as part of living in a new country. Or it may simply reflect the range of attitudes towards the Māori language in New Zealand among non-Māori New Zealanders (e.g., Boyce, 2005).

4.5 Knowledge of tikanga Māori

With regard to the part that the books played in the participants' knowledge of tikanga Maori, all four participants reported learning more about this through participating in this study. P1 and P4 reported learning more about Māori medicine from 'Koro's Medicine'. P2 felt she and her children had become

more aware of a relationship with nature ('The Kowhai Tree', 'The Puriri Tree') and ways of viewing death ('Haere'). She reported that she and her children had been introduced to 'a bigger concept of death and how others treat it.'(P2/8). They had also learnt about the special role of pounamu (from 'Taming the Taniwha'): 'we had a talk about that, of course, we had a talk about that 'cos I've got a pounamu and [husband's name] wears his all the time. So we did have a talk about the pounamu' (P2/8).

P3 reported that she had learnt more about Māori medicine from the book 'Koro's Medicine': 'I was quite excited about that and … I didn't … I mean I knew that they used the plants, but I hadn't thought about how or what. And even just things in my garden … oh, splendid!' (P3/7). She also learnt about the use of pounamu to celebrate a new stage of learning ('Taming the Taniwha'): 'And I like the idea at the end of the Taniwha book how they gave him the pounamu to celebrate that. That was just glorious! I liked that' (P3/7). She also mentioned learning about the spiritual aspects of Māori culture, for example, having no doubt that there is an afterlife: 'it was quite good to have the spiritual thing of the Māori way coming through, 'cos it kind of goes hand-in-hand with the Scottish way of the spirits and stuff' (P3/7), and the feeling of belonging to a group of people, not just your parents: 'like all the way through. You know, even when he's with his grandpa in the Taniwha book, or … there's a real sense of belonging to a group of people. You don't just belong to Mum and Dad, you belong to this group of people who love and support you in lots of different ways … and will tell you different things and you have to decide what you want from that' (P3/8).

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings from this small study introduce several novel findings with regard to the power of language use in New Zealand English children's picture books using a high frequency of Māori loanwords. Firstly it is clear that in the case of the four parents interviewed in this study, these books affected at a minimum the receptive and in some cases also the expressive use of Māori loanwords. This ties in with the literature reviewed by Cunningham (2002), mentioned earlier, with regard to children learning vocabulary from the reading of books. However, no previous studies appear to have been conducted with regard to adult vocabulary acquisition.

All four parents reported difficulty in pronouncing at least some of the loanwords used in the books. In the case of parents who had not developed a phonological familiarity with te reo Māori by virtue of growing up in New Zealand (P3 and P4), children were able to offer their parents help with pronunciation, a phenomenon not previously reported in the literature. The parents who did have familiarity with Māori pronunciation (either from school background (P1) or lessons as an adult (P2)) were not offered help by their children, as obviously their knowledge of and familiarity with Māori pronunciation was greater than that of their children. However, all four participants reported having to sound out any unfamiliar words, to try them out in front of their children. Thus, as mentioned above, they were modeling their decoding strategies. What is all the more powerful about this phenomenon is how unusual it is for children to hear their adult readers modeling decoding strategies. The language used in most children's picture books will be familiar to most parent readers, and so children usually hear very fluent reading from their parents. The value of not only hearing the specific strategies used (about which this study provides no detail), but also being introduced to the idea that sounding out words, that is decoding them, is a normal part of reading is potentially a very profound experience which may give children increased confidence when they also need to sound out unfamiliar words. There is also a leveling of what I observe to be a power differential usually present in the learning-to-read process.

Thus the answer to Research Question 1 is an emphatic 'yes'. The language in children's picture books did affect the language use of the parents reading the books, even after only a one month period. These books also provided the opportunity for parents to accept expert help from their children or at least an opportunity to model, albeit unconsciously, their personal decoding strategies for their children.

With regard to Research Question 2 concerning the effect of these books on the cultural knowledge of tikanga Maori, all four participants reported increased understanding of aspects of tikanga Maori. Again, this area has been discussed in depth with respect to the place of multicultural literature in exposing children to new cultural understandings (McVeagh, 2003; Cullinan & Galda, 2002), but nowhere can I find literature examining the effect on adults. This phenomenon of adults learning by 'overhearing' information they are reading for their children may be similar to the phenomenon described by Craddock (2002): 'Reading a book is … an experience of overhearing. The messages in the books are addressed by the authors to someone else, or to

no-one or to everyone….The reader is always free to reflect, accept, reject, resolve' (p. 90).

Of course the limits of this study include the use of four participants only, and the fact that these four participants did have an above average exposure to te reo Maori. Future studies will administer similar semi-structured interviews to new participants to examine whether the themes discussed in this paper are valid for other adult readers, and to discover other themes which may emerge. The need for follow-up interviews with parents regarding the longer term effects of both vocabulary and cultural knowledge is also apparent.

Most of us would accept that children's picture books have the potential to affect the language and cultural knowledge of children being read to, and the literature certainly supports this. However, this study shows the potential power of New Zealand English children's picture books to also affect the language use and cultural knowledge of the adult readers of these books (in this study the parents), which of course will ultimately magnify the potential effects for the listening children.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on a conference paper delivered to the 2008 Language and Society Conference held at the University of Otago. Thanks to Assoc. Prof. Margaret Maclagan for her suggestions regarding the concept of 'overhearing', and to Dr. Julia de Bres for her help with constructing some of the questions used in the semi-structured interview. The comments and suggestions of two anonymous reviewers are also gratefully acknowledged. I would also like to acknowledge the parents who participated in this study for their time and interest in the project.

Notes

1 A study of the frequency of Māori loan words in New Zealand English in New Zealand School Journals of the 1960s and 1990s showed an incidence of just under 6 words per 1,000 (Macalister, 1999). Kennedy and Yamazaki (1999) also found borrowed Māori words at a rate of just under 6 per thousand words. Macalister (2006) has examined the use of Māori loan words in New Zealand English across a 150 year period from 1850-2000. He examined a corpus of a little under five and a half million words from three sources: Newspapers, parliamentary debates and School Journals. Across the three sources there was an increase from 3.29 words per 1,000 in 1850 to 8.8 per thousand in 2000.

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Appendix: Questions for semi-structured interview of parents

Preamble: In this interview I will use the term 'Māori loanword'. This refers to any Māori words used in an English language book. Examples of ones which are commonly used are: kai, aroha, and pounamu.

First some background questions about language use.

1. What languages do you speak?
2. How long have you lived in New Zealand?
3. Have you ever learnt Māori? Could you tell me about where and for how long?
4. How would you describe your familiarity with Māori?
5. Do you/Have you attend(ed) functions or gathering in which te reo Māori is used?
6. Do you use more loanwords in some situations than in others? Can you tell me about these situations?

Now moving onto some questions specifically about the books you've been reading.

7. How often did you read the books to your children?
8. Were there any favourites?
9. Why do you think you/your children enjoyed these books in particular?
10. How confident were you about reading the Māori loanwords in these books?
11. Did the use of Māori loanwords ever put you off reading a particular book?

12. Do you notice yourself using loanwords more frequently after reading these books?
13. Do you notice your child(ren) using loanwords more frequently after reading these books? Can you give specific examples?
14. Do you think reading these books affected your knowledge of Māori culture in any way? Can you give some specific examples?