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## Examining a Northern Sámi-Norwegian Dual Language Picturebook in English Language Education Through a Critical Translingual-Transcultural Lens



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### Abstract

The present article explores the affordances of a dual language Northern Sámi-Norwegian picturebook in addressing multilingualism and interculturality in the primary English language classroom. Both notions of interculturality and multilingualism have received increased attention as fundamental components in English language teaching (ELT), yet they have been mostly addressed as separate concepts. Furthermore, because interculturality has traditionally been theorised as communicating across geographical/national borders, local diversities, such as indigenous cultures and languages, have often been overlooked or misrepresented in the language classroom. Similarly, linguistic diversity has mostly been viewed through the monolingual lens. As classrooms around the world have become increasingly diverse, both culturally and linguistically, it is important for teachers to engage with these multiple languages and identities, not as separate entities in faraway lands, but also through an exploration of local indigenous diversities. The dual language picturebook provides a textual-visual space to engage teachers and learners with the multilingual turn in tandem with the transcultural perspective. The chosen picturebook, *Ábiid plástihkat – Plasten i havet* (2020), by Rita Sørly (author) and Malgorzata Piotrowska (illustrator) opens up the interpretative possibilities of multimodal texts as socially-just, diversity-focused, visually-complex and language-conscious semiotic objects. Embedded in a specific cultural context, the English classroom in northern Norway, this paper positions the dual language picturebook as a potential resource for exploring indigenous languages and cultures in Grades 1–7 and for attending to global-local diversities through a critical translingual-transcultural lens.

**Keywords:** dual language picturebooks, translingual-transcultural, indigenous cultures, plurilingual practices, teacher education, primary English

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## Introduction

Multilingual or dual language picturebooks have the potential for demonolingualising, complexifying and humanising the English classroom. The use of picturebooks as a resource in primary English language teaching (PELT) has been extensively explored in the last thirty years from a pedagogical-linguistic (Ellis & Brewster, 2014), theoretical-aesthetic (Mourão, 2015), critical (Johnson, Mathis, & Short, 2019) and intercultural perspective (Driscoll & Simpson, 2015; Bland, 2020; Dolan, 2014; Heggernes, 2020). The picturebook provides primary English language teachers with an authentic visual-linguistic resource for exploring emotions and values, addressing social justice issues and underrepresentation as well as integrating intercultural and citizenship themes. However, mis- and underrepresentation of diversity in children's literature has been emphasised by the predominance of white, western-centric characters from traditional family structures dominating the picturebook landscape (Schmitt, 2020).

The entry into multicultural worlds and ensuing explorations of intercultural dialogue (Heggernes, 2019) in English primary education has tended to focus on a narrow view of language and culture (Short, 2009). It has occurred mostly via one language, the target language, which in this case is English, and the corresponding "target-language countries" (Risager, 2020), where the target language is a majority language, such as Britain or the US. Despite occasional forays into the "shared classroom language" (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015, p. 8) or majority language, which in this article is Norwegian, engagement with other languages, such as indigenous languages, has been non-existent, sporadic or unsystematic (Barfield & Uzarski, 2009). As teaching and learning have been embedded, for the most part, in a monolingual paradigm, PELT has struggled to engage with the rich cultural, linguistic diversity and complex identities that pervade the so-called English-speaking world (Tupas & Renandya, 2020), or any context where English is a basic skill in the curriculum (Enever, 2018). Relegated to a page or a unit in a coursebook, with an over reliance on BANA (British, Australian and North American) countries (Bland, 2020; Risager, 2020), the focus on "teaching culture" has mostly prioritised essentialist (Hoff, 2018) nation-specific stereotypes through reductive comparative approaches (Brown & Habbege-Conti, 2022). This Anglocentric white washing of ELT has invisibilised indigenous cultures and languages, which are still positioned as inferior and as having very little to contribute to modern-day society (Reese, 2018). However, in a superdiverse and transnational world, it has become imperative to move away from one-dimensional cultural categories with appendaged separate and essentialist linguistic systems that erase complex individual identities.

In view of the above, this article proposes to soften the linguistic and cultural boundaries that encircle primary ELT so as to create more dynamic and critical learning environments which are inclusive of local-global diversities. It tackles these issues by addressing the interplay between the intercultural and multilingual perspectives in the PELT classroom. The rapprochement of the *inter-cultural* (Byram, 2021; Byram, Porto, & Wagner, 2021; Kramsch, 2009) and *multi-linguistic* (García & Li Wei, 2014; Galante, 2020; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021) phenomena is explored through a "trans" perspective, thus facilitating a translingual-transcultural approach to developing critical literacy through children's literature. In order to explore this relationship in a concrete and child-appropriate manner, this paper analyses the visual, linguistic and literary affordances of a Northern Sámi-Norwegian dual language picturebook, *Ábiid plástihkat – Plasten i havet* (2020), created by Rita Sørly (author) and Malgorzata Piotrowska (illustrator) and translated into Northern Sámi by Rauni Magga Lukkari. Hence, this article sheds an innovative light on PELT as it attempts to interlink concepts that have traditionally been tackled separately in both research and practice and foregrounds the English classroom as a potential space for interweaving multilingualism and interculturality.

## **Primary English Education at the Translingual-Transcultural Crossroads**

Children in primary education are increasingly exposed to other cultures and languages in their immediate learning contexts. This increase in diversity is a result of voluntary and/or forced mobility, migration and the acknowledgement of historical local languages and cultures such as the Sámi in Norway. For example, the number of immigrant children or children born to immigrant parents in Norwegian schools is 18.5% (Statistics Norway, 2021). The number of children with Sámi as a first and second language, who have a right to education in Sámi, is relatively small, yet all children in Norway must learn about the Sámi people and Sámi conditions in school (Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2020a). These realities have dramatically reshaped the role of languages and cultures in the primary English classroom, as it now engages with the fluidity, dynamism and transnational nature of the linguistic and cultural domains.

According to Driscoll and Simpson (2015),

fostering an open mindset, developing tolerance, cultural sensitivity and an acceptance and understanding of diversity in increasingly multilingual and multicultural societies are essential features in preparing young people for a future which is not confined by local, regional or national borders (p. 168).

Nonetheless, as many of the theories on intercultural learning have been developed with and for adults, integrating interculturality in the primary years has often relied on surface-level encounters with the “5-F’s – food, fashion, folklore, festivals, and famous people” (Short, 2009, p. 5). Furthermore, when indigenous cultures are included in coursebooks, they are positioned as tokenistic, folkloric and static objects. In a study that analysed the positioning of indigenous cultures in English course books in Norway, Wallaan Brown and Habegger-Conti (2017) identified a strong trend

to focus on traditional aspects of indigenous people, a tendency to represent indigenous people in a lower position of power than the viewer, and to distance the viewer. Comparatively, the images of white people more frequently invite the viewer to interact and empathize with the participants (p.16).

These representations position learners and teachers as spectators, distant and alienated from the reality of different lives, thus perpetuating the “us” and “them” perspective. These findings are corroborated by other studies in Norway (Eriksen, 2018; Lund, 2016; Olsen, 2017) and in other indigenous contexts. For example, Clark (2007) discusses the representations of Aboriginal peoples in textbooks used historically and in present-day Canada. Reese (2018) criticises the choice of children’s books celebrating Thanksgiving as “most of these books and activities default to stereotypes where Native people are shown in feathered headdresses and fringed clothing”, “inadvertently locating Native lives in the past” (p. 391). These approaches perpetuate stereotypes instead of creating age-sensitive practices to help children discover, examine and reflect on the complexity of their own and other worlds and engage with global political, economic and environmental challenges. The PELT classroom needs to engage with these challenges by developing skills and attitudes, employing techniques and integrating materials that reflect this complexity.

### **Interculturality and Multilingualism in the Norwegian Curriculum**

In response to this new reality, a focus on interculturality and multilingualism is slowly being included in supranational (Council of Europe, 2018) and national curricula around the world, which legitimises and officialises these areas in primary education. In Norway, the intercultural domain has gained prominence and is intermingled with linguistic diversity in the new updated curriculum, LK20 (Norwegian Directorate

of Education and Training, 2020a). The English subject curriculum (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020b) is positioned as a privileged playing ground for developing translingual-transcultural perspectives: “English is an important subject when it comes to cultural understanding, communication, all-round education and identity development”; “Language learning involves seeing connections between English and other languages the students know”; “English shall help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns” (p. 2). The reference to English texts as a vehicle for exploring diversity is significant. Texts are positioned as resources that help “develop the pupils’ knowledge and experience of linguistic and cultural diversity” (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020b, p. 3). Furthermore, “reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of texts in English” is encouraged as they can help learners to “see[...] their own identity and others’ identities in a multilingual and multicultural context” (p. 3). The Grade 2 and Grade 4 competence aims include a specific mention of children’s literature: “learn words and acquire cultural knowledge through English-language literature for children” (p. 5).

Equally, references to indigenous cultures have increased. Until the curriculum renewal in 2020, Sámi content was almost non-existent (Gjerpe, 2018) and exploring Sámi cultures was never seen as an objective for the English subject. In the current updated curriculum, Sámi and indigenous content are visible throughout the core curricula, for example: “Through the training, the students will gain insight into the Sámi indigenous peoples’ history, culture, social life and rights. The students will learn about diversity and variation within Sámi culture and community life” (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020a, p. 6). There are also references to indigenous cultures in the English curriculum: “Working with texts in English helps to develop the pupils’ knowledge and experience of linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as their insight into ways of living, ways of thinking and traditions of indigenous peoples” (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020b, p. 3). However, they are only mentioned in the competence aims for Year 10, “explore and reflect on the situation of indigenous peoples in the English-speaking world and in Norway” (p. 9), which might exclude the primary classroom as a prime location for engaging with local diversities.

Despite these explicit references to the multilingual, intercultural and indigenous dimensions, the Norwegian curriculum does not suggest ways of integrating translingual, intercultural approaches in the English classroom. Kalaja and Pitkänen-Huhta (2020) regret that curriculum documents remain very much “at the level of buzzwords and lack any concrete applications” (p. 347). Myklevold and Speitz (2021) call out the celebratory approach to multilingualism (Berthelé, 2021) and the ideological premise of the Norwegian curriculum, as it offers little guidance in how to understand these concepts in a coherent and systematic manner. In order to operationalise the curriculum in the PELT classroom, teachers need access to materials that “expand children’s discursive repertoires” (Ibrahim, 2021, p. 142); that are “in sync with children’s ages and stages of development, as well as their English language proficiency levels” (Read, in press); and that indigenise the ELT classroom. Murray (2022) suggests an *indigenisation* of English language teaching materials, “as a step toward bringing these diversities in culture into the classroom when working with topics relating to Indigenous peoples” (4). *Indigenisation* of the English classroom could include authentic materials, such as dual language picturebooks that incite deeper critical reflection around historical and contemporary issues and allow indigenous cultures and languages to exist, be seen and heard in ELT. The dual language picturebook is proposed as a multilingual resource that invites other local languages into the English language learning space, while visibilising and normalising the interlinking of linguistic and intercultural knowledge (Carlsen, 2020).

### Dual Language Picturebooks

Dual language picturebooks tell the same story in two languages “with illustrations to link visual and textual representations” (Naqvi, Thorne, Pfitschordstokk, & McKeoughat, 2013, p. 4). Daly, Kleker

and Short (2020) categorise dual language picturebooks into three overarching groups, depending on the disposition of the different languages: (1) Interlingual picturebooks intermingle the main text of the story with occasional words and phrases from another language; (2) Bilingual picturebooks combine two or more languages, where the entire text is presented fully in two languages, either on the same page, on facing pages, or in different sections of a book; (3) Dual version picturebooks are the same picturebook, published separately in two different languages. The selected picturebook in this article belongs in category No. 2, where the two languages appear on separate and adjacent pages.

The dual language picturebook provides a (con)textual space where teachers and learners can explore the sociocultural experiences of previously underrepresented groups (Botelho and Rudman, 2009) and critically engage with cultural and linguistic diversity. This aesthetic object is positioned as a “polyphonic” (Morgado, 2019, p. 173) resource, providing socially, culturally, linguistically and historically appropriate content for the PELT classroom. The inherent complexity of the dual language picturebook has the potential to embody the translanguaging-transcultural encounter. It does so by combining two linguistic systems and different visual cultures with an underlying social/political theme that enhances the experience of alterity (Hartman, 2021; Hélot, Sneddon & Daly, 2014). As “positions are not neutral, they tend to support the worldviews, beliefs, values, actions and languages of some people and not others” (Janks, Dixon, Ferreira, Granville, & Newfield, 2014, p. 12), and the positioning of indigenous people in society has been mirrored and perpetuated in educational discourse and materials. Hartmann’s (2021) use of an active verb when describing the role of multiple language picturebooks to “enact the intercultural encounter” (p. 92), positions the text as a disruptor of the dominant discourse around indigeneity.

First and foremost, dual language picturebooks foreground the multilinguistic element. Daly (2018) views dual language picturebooks as a linguistic landscape that “reflects the relative status of languages, attitudes towards the languages, and perhaps also the purpose of the book” (p. 558). Indeed, carefully selected dual language picturebooks reveal more than just a different language on the page. They provide teachers with an intermingling of images, sounds, scripts and lived experiences that purposefully turn the spotlight on hidden linguistic diversities and may expand critical engagement with different cultural worlds. In researching translanguaging in dual language Māori-English picturebooks, Daly (2014) sees the existence of Māori words in the English text as a “window between worlds” (p. 35) with far reaching pedagogical implications for visibilising minority cultures and crossing cultural lines. Not only do the Māori readers “hear their own voices in the stories” (p. 43), but these picturebooks foreground indigeneity, making the Māori language and culture visible and tangible, as well as legitimizing and contributing to the revitalization of indigenous languages (Hadaway & Young, 2013). Besides the presence of indigenous languages, their positioning on the page as well as design choices, such as, typeface, type size, type colour and page layout (Vanderschantz, Daly, & San, 2022), have implications for pedagogical discussions around linguistic and cultural representation.

Secondly, “as multimodal representations of reality” (Morgado, 2019, p. 165), picturebooks provide a strong visual element for analysing contemporary diverse societies and developing critical visual literacy. Serafini (2012) claims that images are “no longer subservient to the printed text but are a system of meaning in their own right and an essential design element of the graphic novel and illustrated text” (p. 30). They reflect and enhance, decentre and contradict the verbal story, and create an intricate narrative and counter-narrative. This “dual identity requires students to develop as many skills and strategies for interpreting visual images and design elements as they develop for making sense of written language” (Serafini, 2012, p. 30). The engagement with the textual-visual features of a picturebook is further complexified by foregrounding the *multi*-linguistic element. Kümmerling-Meibauer (2013) describes dual language picturebooks as complex and challenging because the “relationship between the picture and words is determined by diverse visual codes on the one hand and interconnection of two different languages and

scripts on the other hand” (p. 13). Furthermore, “the encounter with an unknown language and script supports the experience of alterity (or “otherness”) already emphasized by the cultural allusions in the images” (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2013, p. 18). The dual language text constitutes a textual-visual artefact, where the interanimation of the visual and verbal, images and print, colour and texture, layout and design choices may expand children’s imaginative spaces (Valente, in press). Through critical inquiries about the presence and position of languages and cultural semiotic references, the text may take learners “outside the boundaries of their lives to other places, times, and ways of living” (Short, 2011, p. 50).

Dual language picturebooks have been used for developing language awareness, exploring attitudes towards multilingualism (Ibrahim, 2020), visibilising indigenous cultures and “encouraging children’s inquiries into language and culture, including engagements with books containing unfamiliar languages” (Daly, Kleker, & Short, 2020, p. 77). In this article, the selected dual language picturebook paves the way for engagement with a lesser-known language and culture that may or may not be part of the diversity within the classroom. Through the visual and linguistic affordances of the picturebook, the children may be invited to walk through the sliding glass door (Sims Bishop, 1990) to cross linguistic and cultural borders in developing into intercultural citizens. In the next section, the article explores the merging of the multilingual and intercultural dimensions through a *trans* perspective, as an ideological underpinning for supporting critical literacy and diversity in the primary classroom.

### The Critical Translingual-Transcultural Lens

Language and culture are fundamentally socially constructed, dynamic processes that rely on the negotiation of meaning based on contextual knowledge, personal experiences and evolving identities (Kramsch, 2009; Prieto-Arranz, Juan-Garau, & Jacob, 2013). These processes of becoming and belonging have often depended on the creation of a unitary linguistic and cultural identity, where an “othering” national discourse (Murray, 2020) invented the foreigner, the alien, the immigrant, the non-native speaker. Yet, societies have always accommodated diversity, whether they have been willing or not to engage with it, and when they do, with justice and respect for the so-called “Other”. Education has played an ambivalent role in upholding the national discourse, while simultaneously struggling to address the harmful effects of a blind, insensitive and coercive system of integration or assimilation (Thompson, 2011). Hence, in order to create a truly intercultural communicative space in primary classrooms, it is crucial for teachers to get rid of “such essentialist, reductive images of identities [with the aim to overcome] binary oppositions like native/non-native, exclusion/inclusion [...]” (Derivry-Plard, 2013, p. 255).

In this section, the article proposes a critical translingual-transcultural dimension to deconstruct these barriers in the PELT classroom. Firstly, it summarises the relevant theoretical perspectives of multilingualism and interculturality through a critical lens. This discussion is underpinned by Freire and Macedo’s (2011) critical pedagogy, which captures the need for individuals “to be aware of their actions in relation to social and historical contexts, political structures and power relations” (p. 40). In ELT, this means going beyond the “lands and peoples tradition” (Risager, 2007, p. 27) in language education and explicitly and unequivocally positioning the multi-linguistic as integral to the intercultural dimension. Secondly, it presents an innovative approach to analysing and working with children’s literature: the critical translingual-transcultural lens, which constitutes two dimensions, with criticality as an overarching concern:

1. A critical translingual lens, which goes beyond the *multi-* or *plurilingual* to acknowledge the multiple ways in which languages and cultures are connected in fluid and dynamic communicative, textual and multimodal interactions.
2. A critical transcultural lens, which reconceptualises the *intercultural*, or in-between space, as *transcultural* in a reciprocal fluid exchange of knowledge, identities, modalities and language(s).

Underpinning the critical translingual-transcultural lens is the multilingual, multicultural and multimodal text, a multifaceted “midwife of meaning” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 4) which has the potential to engage learners with social, political, textual and linguistic power dynamics. Literature “enables students to examine the politics of daily life within contemporary society with a view to understanding what it means to locate and actively seek out contradictions within modes of life, theories, and substantive intellectual positions” (Bishop, 2017, p. 371). Critical literacy in this paper is seen as a transformative process, where language, text and discourse play a key role in transforming the status quo. According to Anderson and Irvine (1993), critical literacy offers learners, regardless of identities or subjectivities, opportunities to become “border crossers”. It entails “learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (p. 82). More recently, Chang and Salas (2021) advocate going “beyond the depoliticized versions of critical thinking [by challenging] the deficit representations of language learners” (p. 15). Hence, cross-cultural study should include literature that reflects complexity in terms of the social, political, aesthetic, historical, linguistic and geographical contexts of different groups of peoples. The text then provides “ways of conceptualizing critical literacy as a project of reconstruction and redesign” (Janks, 2014, p. 349). In this case, the dual language text reconstructs the English classroom as a trilingual space as children learn to cross linguistic and cultural barriers via textual-visual bridges and redesigns classroom interaction through multiple lenses. It transforms the profoundly engaged, analytical and creative “intercultural reader” (Hoff, 2016, p. 52) into a critical *reader-viewer* and expands this re-positioning of the text, the teacher and the learners to embrace the complexity of translingual-transcultural practice.

### **The Critical Translingual Dimension**

The critical translingual dimension tackles monolingual language ideologies and acknowledges and decentres the overpowering influence of the English language.

#### ***Language ideologies and the English language***

Language ideologies have played a significant role in perpetuating inequalities (Piller, 2016, p. 14) and maintaining divisive barriers and polarising practices in place (Szelie, Pinho, & Tinoca, 2021, p. 3). For example, monolingual school policies contribute to the marginalisation, invisibilising and silencing of non-dominant languages, including local indigenous languages. Furthermore, they support language hierarchies and position children’s heritage languages as irrelevant to the learning and identity development process (Skutnabb-Kangas *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, teachers may be unaware of the learners’ inherent cultural and linguistic identities because the learners are not encouraged to reflect on and explore this aspect of the self. These ideologies also maintain the assumption that languages are separate, distinct entities that individuals switch between, rather than cross freely amongst. In order to capitalise on these opportunities to engage children in multilingual exposure, creative language play and language discovery, professionals need to be “naming and engaging the everyday language practices of bi/multilingual communities” (Lau & Van Viegan, 2020, p. 5). This includes approaches with the potential to disrupt the monolingual premise of education and focus on the “trans” aspects of languaging. Hence, translanguaging (García & Li Wei, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021) and translingual communication (Canagarajah, 2013; Rabbidge, 2019; Galante, 2020; Lau & Van Viegan, 2020) constitutes a legitimate pedagogy. Pachecoet *et al.*, (2019) frame translingual practice as “bundles of activity that involve mobilizing and meshing divergent semiotic resources—including uses of the body, texts, shared understandings of context, and linguistic resources — to achieve communicative ends” (p. 76). The reference to texts in the previous quote is relevant to this article, as a dual language picturebook is presented as a space for mobilizing and meshing multiple visual, thematic and critical perspectives. This encounter with a non-English text

to explore the reality of local linguistic and cultural experiences, mediated by the English language, requires translanguaging competences. The multilingual text provides teachers and learners with a resource that transgresses the categorical distinctions of the past, creating more fluid transformative and transdisciplinary learning spaces.

Acknowledging the overpowering influence of the English language is key to expanding its remit to decolonise (Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021) and demonolingualise (Ibrahim, 2022) the learning space. The exclusive focus on one language narrows the possibility of more in-depth intercultural exchanges, negates the reality of communication across languages and obscures the cultural subtleties carried by different linguistic systems. Ironically, English has been characterised as a hybrid language, dependent on and integral to the transnational flows that created the need for a *lingua franca*. Simultaneously, it is a language that has become a part of local communities, complexifying the social fabric of societies and refashioning local identities. Pennycook (2007) describes English as “a translocal language, a language of fluidity and fixity that moves across, while becoming embedded in the materiality of localities and social relations” (pp. 4–5). Yet, as Barfield and Uzarski (2009) claim, “most EFL programs use curricula from English-dominant countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia” (p. 2). The tacit acceptance that these countries are English-speaking, white and monocultural camouflages the reality of the multiple diversities that enrich these learning contexts. By integrating non-English multilingual texts and actively engaging with the languages inherent in these texts, the role of English as the object of study may be expanded to become a bridge for crossing linguistic and cultural lines. Consequently, ELT can be repurposed to engage teachers and learners in exploring the so-called English-speaking world from anti-racist, decolonial and diverse perspectives if teachers develop a catalogue of critical translingual-transcultural practices.

### **The Critical Transcultural Dimension**

The transcultural dimension goes beyond the intercultural to acknowledge the dynamism and complexity of cultural exchanges in diverse societies. Also, it foregrounds the political and social responsibility of language education in relation to indigenous cultures. As “positions are not neutral, they tend to support the worldviews, beliefs, values, actions and languages of some people and not others” (Janks *et al.*, 2014, p. 12), and the positioning of indigenous people in society is mirrored and perpetuated in educational discourse and materials. Taking a transcultural approach involves questioning the ideological dimension of texts, unmasking dominant ideologies and highlighting gaps and ambiguities that potentially lead to critical reflection and social action.

### ***From in-between spaces to sliding glass doors***

In the spaces of diversity that learners occupy today, the act of engaging with increasingly multilingual and multicultural societies is not a fixed competence, as individual cultures are not monolithic entities. On the contrary, it is “a dynamic, flexible, and locally contingent competence” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 199), which includes “plural language norms and mobile semiotic resources” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 172). An intercultural dimension (Byram, 2021) has evolved to take its rightful place in the English classroom, which has been theorised as a space for engaging with cultural complexity. However, there is still a need to deconstruct barriers to allow for more fluid interactions across and through different linguistic and cultural worlds.

Consequently, we need to question the prefix “inter” in “intercultural”. It denotes a hypothetical third intermediate space, where the “Other” and their “othered” realities can be safely explored, identities negotiated, and new identities can flourish. However, this symbolic intercultural space, as a concept of in-betweenness, is inadequate in describing cross cultural exchange. It is assumed that cultural



dialogue is only possible in this intermediary space, whereas language and culture are complex, multi-dimensional and constantly shifting phenomena. The link to identifiable national cultures and languages that the individual brings to the third space is still strong, creating an indelible “intercultural line” (Holliday, 2011, p. 164) between “our” culture and the “foreign” other. Drawing away these curtains reveals a sliding glass door (Sims Bishop, 1990) through which to engage children in translingual and transcultural dialogue in an incessant movement through differences, and not only between differences. Baker and Sangiamchit (2019, p. 472) characterise transcultural communication “as communication where interactants move through and across, rather than in-between, cultural and linguistic boundaries, thus, “named” languages and cultures can no longer be taken for granted” as participants in intercultural communication “may not always be “between” identifiable cultures or languages” (Baker, 2022, p. 23). On the contrary, they already come from a place of hybridity and complexity, and engage in a process of crossing through borders, which “become blurred, transgressed and transcended and transformed” (Baker, 2022, p. 34). In this article, the selected picturebook, *Ábiid plástihkat – Plasten i havet*, is used to exemplify and operationalise the complexity of the critical translingual-transcultural lens.

### Ábiid Plástihkat – Plasten i Havet

As a complex linguistic and cultural artefact, the dual language picturebook, *Ábiid plástihkat – Plasten i havet*<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1), is well positioned to cross borders by acknowledging “the multiple histories, [...] dynamism, diversity and fluidity of the cultural experience” (Botelho & Rudman, 2019, p. 5). Kümmerling-Meibauer (2013) argues that “only an interdisciplinary approach that considers findings in picturebook research, multilingual didactics, literacy studies, and second language acquisition will be able to decipher all the complex visual and linguistic codes implemented in these works” (p. 19). Hence, the picturebook is analysed as a peritextual-textual-visual ensemble that allows the two dimensions of the critical translingual-transcultural dimension to surface, with a particularly strong focus on the visual element: a) visual cues and peritextual ponderings (Valente, in press), b) visual and translingual positionings and c) visual and transcultural extensions.



Figure 1 Front and back covers of the picturebook.

<sup>1</sup> The author granted permission for use of the images in this paper.

## Visual Cues and Peritextual Ponderings

This section explores the visual narrative of the peritext, with particular attention to the front and back covers of the book, and the end papers. It aims to communicate the thematic focus of the story and sets the scene for the translingual-transcultural discussions that follow.

The title in the front and the blurb on the back covers (Figure 1), supported by the illustrations, foreground the global struggle against climate change. The picturebook includes a rich palette of colour, especially different hues of blue, identifying the sea as a strong continuous thematic presence. The explicit environmental theme is evident in the title, which translates to Plastic in the Sea, and reflects the artistic cues that spread across the front and back covers: the multiple hues of blue together with the two divers on the front cover, the colourful and pastel-shaded fish of all shapes and sizes and other pale, transparent splashes, blobs, dots and shapes creating depth and perspective. When the covers are analysed with more scrutiny, some of the blobs start taking shape into various forms of polluting objects, that is, plastic bags, tins, plastic bottles, a broken doll, a flip flop. The presence of these foreign objects, indistinct at first, highlights the reality of how this lively ecosystem is threatened and connects the image to the title, thus reinforcing the environmental theme.

The blurb on the back cover introduces the two main characters as Aihe and Whina. It adds a little more context by referring to the beginning (Otago, New Zealand) and end (Gamvik, Norway) of a journey, which constitutes the main plot of the story. Aihe and Whina are scientists with expertise in goose-beaked whales. They are invited by Norwegian counterparts to investigate a beached whale in Norway and to participate in a conference about plastic sea pollution. The blurb also introduces the whale species in the story and the problem to be solved, in the form of a question: What has led a whale that lives in the depths of the tropical seas to travel so far north to Gamvik? This question offers an excellent opportunity for teachers to prompt learners to predict the story and the reasons for the whale's predicament. It paves the way for reflection on how human activity is disrupting animal life routines, their habitat and the dire consequences for the planet.

The two scientists decide to travel to Norway by boat, all the while diving and studying the state of the ocean, and they find sea pollution everywhere. The endpapers, depicting the scientists' sea journey across the globe, are strewn with factual information about the extent of pollution in the worlds' oceans. In other words, there is a non-fiction aspect to the book, which is interwoven with the storyline and rationalises the plot to investigate the beached whale. These factual elements appear in a textual-visual relationship throughout the picturebook, for example, an enormous heap of rubbish, which clearly refers to the massive rubbish patches discovered in the ocean; an illustration of a goose as a visual connection to the name of the whale. On the last double-spread, the two scientists are presenting their findings at a conference. On the top left-hand corner of the verso page, among the audience, is a young girl with plaits, sitting on the floor next to a schoolbag (Figure 2).

This visual detail alluding to Greta Thunberg is an obvious reference to climate activism and is followed by a call to action, in both Northern Sámi and Norwegian, with the question: *Can you find five things you can do to stop using plastic?* followed by a verso page with numbers 1–5, where children can add their environmentally friendly ideas. These pedagogical discussions, for example, the identification of the five ideas, can occur in the target language, English with Norwegian as a bridge language, which, together with the visuals support understanding of the text. The question above not only encourages the learners to engage with the picturebook as an environmental artefact but does so through translingual communication.



**Figure 2** Reference to Greta Thunberg.

The artefact may also become an action taking resource, inviting discussions as well as direct action in the community in post-reading extension activities. It may trigger cross curricula projects, prompting the learners to engage in environmental action in their own school, home or communities. For example, they can be prompted to become researchers, replicating the two characters' professions and investigate their own plastic use in the home. This could lead to cross-curricular work where pupils learn to process quantitative data in graphic format in the maths classes before presenting their findings to their fellow classmates, thus developing English speaking and presentation skills. This can be followed by reflection and discussion around their contribution to environmental problems in their community. Thus, the semiotic, translingual pedagogical engagement with the peritext and the main thematic content may give a global environmental problem personal significance as learners experience the impact of plastic at a local level.

### Visual and Translingual Positioning

If the picturebook were to be used as an environmental resource alone, certain elements in the peritext, such as the origin of the characters' names, the presence and positioning of the Northern Sámi text and its visible linguistic identity might be completely ignored or given a secondary status. However, through a critical lens the picturebook is transformed into a translingual artefact that may engage learners in reflecting on power relations through how language(s) are interwoven into the story. From a linguistic perspective, the positioning of languages is significant because it gives the minority language more prominence and power, as it is the first text the reader's eye is drawn to. Throughout the book Northern Sámi is always positioned above Norwegian: in the front and the back matter (the inside and title page, the copyright page, the end papers, the spine of the book) and in the narrative, it appears on the left-hand side of the double-spreads, with Norwegian on the right. The two languages appear at the same level on each page, with a couple of exceptions, when the text needs to accommodate the illustrations, and in those cases, both languages are given the top and bottom position, respectively, thus maintaining an equilibrium. The font, size and colour are also identical, except for the title that uses dark blue for Northern Sámi and white for Norwegian. There seems to be a deliberate decision to position the two languages on equal standing in the text, yet with Northern Sámi in the top position, raising

the status of the minority language. These design features are significant as they impact the perceptions of readers, as well as those who select picturebooks for use with or by children (Vanderschantz & Daly, in press). These choices disrupt the language hierarchies of the status quo, where Norwegian, as the dominant majority language is positioned as equal or in a lower position. The textual-visual space of the picturebook thus becomes a space for recalibrating power relations, but pedagogic mediation is where minority local cultures and languages are mobilised. For example, the following questions can open a window on a linguistic lens that very often remains closed in English classrooms:

- What languages do you see on the front and back covers?
- Where are these languages positioned on the back and front covers?
- Which language appears first? Which language appears second?
- Why do you think the Northern Sámi language appears above the Norwegian text?
- Why is it important that the Northern Sámi language is above Norwegian?
- What does this tell us about the place of Sámi people and Sámi culture in Norway?
- How does this make you read the book differently?

These questions can serve as entry points for discussions around critical issues involving indigenous languages and cultures, such as how power relations can be renegotiated through a textual-visual encounter. A comparison with other bilingual indigenous picturebooks, where languages are positioned below English, can support the discussion around the key role languages play in visibilising and affirming minority identities in children's literature, in the classroom and in society.

The two languages, Northern Sámi and Norwegian, always appear separately and never mixing, which presupposes a rather monolingual vision of language. This fact seems to contradict the translanguaging premise of this article. However, through active engagement with the shared classroom language (Norwegian) and appropriate activities that develop the target language (English) supported by translanguaging pedagogical interactions, learners may be invited to cross over, into the unknown, obscure text of Northern Sámi. For example, as learners are able to interact with the text through Norwegian, they understand the plot. A translanguaging approach, supported by the visual semiotic affordances of the artefact and the use of vocabulary equivalents from the original text, can help them write a summary of the story in English. Depending on the English level or the age of the learners, this translanguaging strategy can be supported by a shared writing activity, with the teacher acting as scribe. The teacher can include comparative discussions of English and Norwegian, providing opportunities to reflect on the structure of the English language and relevant word choices. These multilingual bridges between languages may thus develop learners' metacognitive skills and metalinguistic awareness.

These translanguaging forays between Norwegian and English unfold the potential for crossing incomprehensible, yet fascinating letter combinations of Northern Sámi by turning the spotlight on these differences. Through pedagogical strategies, such as intercomprehension, identifying transparent words or cognates, guessing and comparing the morphosyntactic structure of different languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021), the learners can be invited to cross language differences. For example, they can be asked to identify cognates in the Northern Sámi text by looking for etymologically similar words in the familiar Norwegian text and then looking up the English equivalent:

- *laboratoriet* and *Norge* (Norwegian)
- *laboratoria* and *Norgii* (Northern Sámi)
- *laboratory* and *Norway* (English)

As some words are not transparent, such as the names of fish, teachers can develop learners' ability to use contextual clues for guessing the meaning of words by moving between languages on the

double-spreads. In one of the double-spreads, there is a list of fish in the first sentence. As the list appears on the opposite page in the same order, the learners can guess and identify the Northern Sámi equivalent by using spatial clues. They can also be encouraged to create a trilingual pictorial glossary of animals in the story.

Languages have sounds, melody and phonological specificities that allow a language to exist as an auditory exception. Modern technology can support translingual practice through text-to-speech programmes like the Acapela Group (<https://www.acapela-group.com/>), which allows learners to hear the sounds of a lesser-known minority language, such as Northern Sámi. In this manner, the language is liberated from its written form and can be appropriated by the learners, thus becoming a living breathing reality. Using the Northern Sámi words of fish identified in the picturebook, learners could be encouraged to create a translingual English-Northern Sámi song about protecting sea life. These strategies can make a seemingly opaque linguistic system more accessible to non-Northern Sámi speakers and open the way to engaging with lesser-known languages in local contexts.

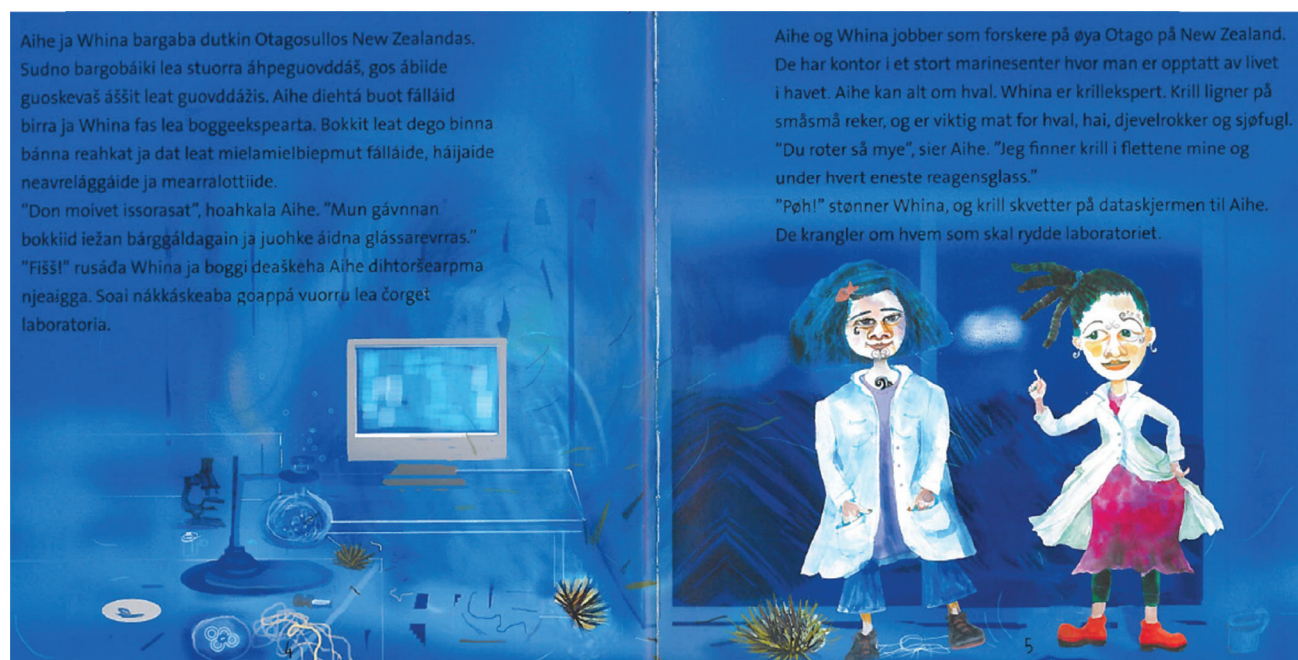
Through this type of classroom activity, children may learn that crossing linguistic borders includes a reciprocal exchange of own linguistic knowledge with elements in the book, which facilitates a dialogic interaction with the text. The learners will bring their knowledge of language, their background, and their deep viewing of the ensemble of the layout, images and different linguistic systems to interact with an unknown text. For example, a linguistic exploration of the title allows for an intercomprehension approach, where children can learn to use language similarities to make sense of an unknown language, without having to be proficient or even actively learning the language. Going beyond the obvious similarity between *plástihkat* and *Plasten* meaning *plastic*, the learners may be prompted to guess the meaning of *Ábiid* and *havet* based on the visual elements on the cover. They can then combine the two and guess the meaning of the title. They can also be encouraged to reflect on word order, which could transform the English classroom into a cross linguistic discovery of grammatical differences:

- Do the words for plastic appear in the same place in each language?
- How does this compare to your language and English?
- Do they have the same word order?
- How many words are there in the title in each language?
- What are the English words for *havet* and *plasten*?
- Which language are the English words closest too?
- What do you notice about the Northern Sámi language? Which word seems to be missing?

These visual, linguistic and auditory bridges not only render the Northern Sámi text more transparent and accessible, but they could also shine a light on the learners' own languages, hence opening a window between the children's worlds and the text.

### Visual and Transcultural Extensions

The picturebook potentialises perspectives beyond the main thematic content. As a translingual-transcultural artefact, it invites children to engage with indigenous issues, not as essentialist, "ethnified or racialized" (Mikander, Zilliacus, & Holm, 2018, p. 49), but as everyday lived experience with resonance at a local and global level. Even though the picturebook is not about indigenous cultures, there are subtle visual and literary references to Māori and Sámi indigeneity. These references include: the Northern Sámi language; New Zealand, where the scientists are from; the Norwegian context, which is identified visually by the pink, lilac hues of the arctic sunsets; the characters, who are identified visually and textually as Māori (Figure 3). These elements provide the tools for engaging in



**Figure 3** *Introducing the Māori characters.*

transcultural activities as the classroom participants explore indigenous issues. Some possible issues of concern in this regard might be how Sámi and Māori peoples have suffered discrimination from assimilationist policies supported by a dominant colonial discourse (Reyhner, 2017), and how they are both fighting to preserve their traditional lands. This could be extended to include other groups, such as the Native Americans' struggles against the oil pipelines.

The literary journey across the world interconnects these two contexts and allows for indigenous peoples, the Māori in New Zealand and the Sámi in Norway, to be positioned as relevant to today's pressing problems on social and environmental justice. The journey becomes a symbolic link between two indigenous contexts, which are visually connected in the endpapers by a white line depicting the itinerary of the scientists' voyage from New Zealand to Norway. There are other elements that may destabilise and decentre the readers' expectations. Even though the text in Northern Sámi and Norwegian indicates a Norwegian setting, the reader is introduced to two Māori female scientists from New Zealand. This twist is pictorially striking, as the reader-viewer moves from the front cover with two unidentified divers, to the first double-spread (Figure 3), where they encounter two women in lab coats, surrounded by laboratory equipment and research samples.

The interplay of visually strong images, that is, traditional face tattoos and white lab coats, supported by the factual language of introducing Māori characters in a New Zealand setting, is juxtaposed by the two languages, and simultaneously appends a gender and indigenous theme to the main environmental topic. These visual disruptors contradict our expectations about the traditional, stereotypical ways of representing indigenous peoples. This is corroborated in a dialogue between Aihe and Whine, who confirm they are the first Māori scientists to be invited to Norway. This dialogue presents another opportunity for critical reflection around the positioning and contribution of indigenous people to society.

As a transcultural activity the teacher can use the Māori tattoos depicted in the book as a springboard for exploring the symbolism of semiotic elements within and across cultures. The tattoos provide a transcultural walkway to engage with the significance of the different designs, as they

tell stories of a person's "whakapapa" or ancestry, their achievements, their responsibilities and place within their families in Māori society. The presence of these tattoos can be discussed as a visibilising strategy, which encourages discussion of representation, reclaiming of lost or under-represented identities, and repositioning these identities as relevant to the major problems the world is facing. Not only do they provide a translingual opportunity to engage with the Māori language through the discovery of the meaning of the tattoos, but they also engage the reader-viewer in questioning the authenticity of the tattoo designs, and the role of the illustrator in recreating cultural symbols. Transposing this to the Norwegian context, learners can be invited to explore the symbolic visual elements in the Sámi culture. Beyond the picturebook, learners can be asked to share with the class elements of their own cultural semiotic identities, and in this manner crossing cultures and languages may involve the self in a discovery of one's own identities, perceptions and feelings.

### Concluding Remarks

This article has proposed an innovative approach to integrating multilingualism and interculturality through literary encounters in primary English language teaching. It has situated the dual language picturebook, written in two languages other than the target language, as a valid textual-visual multilingual artefact in PELT. This novel approach to addressing interculturality and multilingualism is underpinned by a critical perspective that highlights three overall themes: 1) it positions the dual language picturebook as a critical and aesthetic border-crossing artefact; 2) it repositions the primary English classroom as a space for translingual-transcultural rapprochement; 3) it transforms the teacher and children into critical reader-viewers of the word, the picture and the world.

With PELT in Norway as a contextual point of departure for the discussion, the article has drawn on *Ábiid plástihkat – Plasten i Havet* to illustrate what the critical translingual-transcultural lens may imply for pedagogical approaches to literature. It has provided insight into how the classroom participants' active engagement with the two languages of the book (Northern Sámi, an indigenous language, and Norwegian, the majority language in Norway), may play a role in decentring the monolingual-monocultural premise of ELT and amplifying the diverse local voices that are often invisibilised in English classrooms. The article has exemplified how an explicit focus on the linguistic landscape of the picturebook may engender discussions about "how power is exercised, circulated, negotiated, and reconstructed" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 31). This involves, on the one hand, acknowledging the diverse multilingualisms (border, local, indigenous, migrant, foreign) in multicultural classrooms. On the other hand, and at a deeper level, it entails explicitly and purposefully exploring issues of identities, otherness and indigeneity, by questioning the position of the different languages on the page and extending these reflections to the position of minority groups in the classroom and in society. Moreover, the article has demonstrated how *Ábiid plástihkat – Plasten i Havet* can be construed as indigenised ELT material, which encourages teachers and learners to question the historically marginalised treatment of indigenous people and their stories. Through the visual elements that identify the characters as Māori women scientists at the forefront of environmental action, the book deconstructs societal and educational attitudes towards minority groups. The visually rich and linguistically complex character of the picturebook thus opens window between worlds (Daly, 2014), allows movement across worlds, shifting perspectives and potentially transforming the dynamics in English classrooms. In this manner, the dual language picturebook may become a generative space for teachers and learners to interrogate, disrupt and reimagine themselves, each other, and their communities. Hence, the critical translingual-transcultural lens can position the classroom participants in a dialogic relationship with the text, the curriculum and society as they co-construct, and explore and expand their identities as multilingual, intercultural teachers and learners of English.

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