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Refugee-themed picturebooks for ethical understanding in curriculum English

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Introduction

Interest in the use of refugee-themed picturebooks as curricular resource material for school-aged students is growing in English-dominant western countries. Since the turn of the century, refugee-themed children's literature has increased in volume and broadened in scope. With each wave of humanitarian migration new books about current or previous groups of arrivals have been published (Hope, 2008). In Australia these books have featured a diversity of refugee characters, including Vietnamese, Bosnian, Hazara and Karen children, as well as children from un-named African and Middle Eastern countries. Asylum-seeking voyages and immigration detention are often depicted, along with post-resettlement experience of school and community life. Teachers in Australia and other English-dominant western countries of refugee re-settlement such as England and the U.S. have been encouraged to incorporate this literature into the curriculum to teach refugee issues (Dolan, 2014; Hwang & Tipton Hindman, 2014; Dudek, 2006a; Mudiyansele, 2014). In general terms, the present article looks at the curricular resource potential of refugee-themed literature for developing ethical understandings of refugee issues in English-dominant western countries.

More specifically, the focus is on the potential of refugee-themed picturebooks published in Australia for teaching an ethics of responsibility for communication in linguistically diverse settings. The word 'refugee' is used here in both narrow and broad

senses. Where possible, it is used narrowly to refer to those who have secured refugee status as distinct from those who are seeking asylum. But the term is also used in the broad sense, common in public discourse, to refer to phenomena and experience that may be associated with the granting of refugee status – asylum-seeking voyages and post-resettlement life included.

The study is located in the subject of English undertaken by all students during compulsory schooling in Australia, a nation with no official language, but in which English is the majority and dominant language. As shaped by the inaugural national curriculum that has been rolled out variously in the Australian states since 2012, English has three strands: literature, literacy and language. Within this curriculum, ethical understanding is a ‘general capability’ for 21st century work and life. The general capabilities are to be embedded in English and the other subjects of the curriculum. Schools and teachers have some discretion about what they teach in the name of these capabilities (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2015). This study is located in that discretionary curricular space, specifically, at the intersection of ethical understanding with English. Its aim is to look at how pursuit of ethical understanding through refugee-themed picturebooks might enable a deep engagement with the content of the English curriculum.

The study seeks to complement established ways of approaching ethics in curriculum English. An ethics of empathy has long been integral to the literature component of the subject in various settings in English-dominant western countries. English educators have explored the capacity of narrative to spark empathic responses in readers, as indeed have ethics educators (Tuana, 2007). At this time of widespread suspicion of and hostility to asylum-seekers and refugees, it is not surprising that scholars in that literary tradition have pointed to the potential of refugee-themed

picturebooks for developing empathy for humanitarian arrivals (e.g., Dudek, 2006a; Mudiyansele, 2014). The ethical perspective explored in this study – an ethics of responsibility for alterity – has less of a foothold in English but warrants consideration as a complement to the ethics of empathy. Derived from the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, it is an ethics that begins with recognition of the irreducible alterity of others, an ethics that enables pursuit of justice without the assumption that the Other is ‘the same’ as ‘me/us’ (Davis, 1996). This is an ethics that focuses not on the qualities of the Other which spark empathy in the self but on the formation of the ethical self in the course of contact with the Other in all their alterity. It is the possibilities of this ethics for the teaching of the language component of curriculum English through refugee-themed literature that is of interest in this study.

The study is located within the traditions of language awareness (LA), a long established approach to language education that has informed the language strand of English in the Australian curriculum. LA was first developed in the UK in the 1980s (Hawkins, 1987) with a number of intentions, one of which was to tackle discrimination by redressing linguistic intolerance and parochialism. To this end, language variation and change is one of several topics that are introduced into curricula, as has occurred with the Australian curriculum and in some other instances in other English-dominant western countries (Denham & Lobeck, 2010), as well as in many countries in Europe (Candelier, 2004; Mourão & Lourenço, 2015). In the Australian case, that content is concerned with the ways that “languages and dialects are constantly evolving due to historical, social and cultural changes ... [and] demographic movements” (ACARA, 2015, np). While attention has been drawn to possibilities for developing the general capability of intercultural awareness through this sub-strand of English, little attention has been directed to possibilities for ethical understanding.

An ethics of responsibility would seem to hold out much promise with respect to the LA goal of tackling linguistic intolerance and parochialism in order to redress linguistic discrimination. This ethics has been used to challenge indifference to the suffering of asylum-seekers and refugees in Australian education (Christie, 2005) and to identify ways in which Canadian education is closed to the diversity of languages of an immigration nation (Ippolito, 2010). It has been used also to gain insight into the ways that detention centre novels and picturebooks represent the response of Australian citizens to the alterity of refugees (Dudek, 2006a,b). Informed by this prior work, this study extends the ethics of responsibility as developed for understanding linguistic alterity in English-dominant settings to refugee-themed picturebooks.

Although conducted in Australia with its particular history of communal relations and peculiar curricular context, the study might be of broader interest. As noted above, refugee-themed literature has been recommended to teachers of English in English-dominant western nations of refugee resettlement on three continents. However, the focus has been on the literary and literacy components typical of the subject of English (e.g., Mudiyansele, 2014; Hwang & Tipton Hindman, 2014). The language component sometimes incorporated into the subject in the name of LA has yet to receive the same attention. LA is an active area of pedagogic innovation not only in Australia, but also in the UK, Europe and North America (e.g., Candelier, 2004; Denham & Lobeck, 2010), but does not seem to have addressed the possibilities inherent in refugee-themed literature. Accordingly, the contribution of this study lies at the intersection of LA with children's literature and ethical education – areas currently of interest to scholars and practitioners internationally.

The article has four sections. In the first, the Levinasian ethical perspective of the study is explained, highlighting understandings developed in empirical work in

linguistically diverse Canadian classrooms (Ippolito, 2010). In the second section the study is introduced. It is shown that the picturebooks selected for analysis have been created for socially transformative purposes in contemporary Australia. The understandings of picturebooks as multimodal artefacts that informed the analyses (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Mourão, 2012), in particular the translingual understandings of the linguistic mode (Canagarajah, 2014) are explained. In the third section the findings of the analyses are presented. These relate to both the way that linguistic diversity is represented in the books and moments of contact with language variation that call forth translingual dispositions on the part of the reader. This is followed by a fourth and concluding section which looks at the promise of an ethics of responsibility for linguistic alterity for embedding ethics into the language awareness component sometimes incorporated into English.

Understanding linguistic diversity in terms of an ethics of responsibility

The ethics of responsibility for alterity was developed in the phenomenological work of Levinas, a French philosopher born into a Jewish Lithuanian family in the first decade of the twentieth century (Davis, 1996). This ethics was a response to the barbarism of that century, to the world wars and nuclear attacks, to the totalitarianisms of right and left and to the gulags and genocides. Levinas observed that the grounds of reason during the twentieth century had become less ethical and more political, and further, that suffering was imposed deliberately on others. In these conditions he asked whether it is possible to meet Otherness peacefully rather than with violence and hatred. In exploring this question, Levinas identified the ethical relation with the Other as the ground of the self and the source of moral goodness. For Levinas, the self comes into existence through exposure to the irreducible alterity of the Other. The key word here is ‘irreducible’: Otherness is not reduced to that which is opposed to or different from the

self; rather, it exists separately from the self. Accordingly, the self is not opposed to or different from the Other, but is separate from it. Indeed, it is in the encounter of self and Other – an ethical moment – that the separate identity of the self is confirmed. The encounter with Otherness is initially peaceful; it simply entails recognition of the limits of the power and freedom of the self. For the self, this is a moment of “real choices between responsibility and obligation towards the Other, or hatred and violent repudiation” (Davis, 1996, p. 49). It is in these choices that the possibilities of moral goodness reside.

The Levinasian perspective has gained ground not only in relation to refugee issues as described above (Christie, 2005; Dudek, 2006a,b), but also in other struggles for justice for those who are disenfranchised by race, gender, religion, class, institutional position and other relations of social power. It is a perspective that offers no moral rules or imperatives, only “a passionate moral conviction that the Other should be heard” (Davis, 1996, p. 144). When applied to a detention centre novel, it has enabled analysis of the potential of representations of ‘ordinary’ people who, having read letters from detainees, rise up and take responsibility for transforming the ‘welcome’ Australia extends to asylum-seekers (Dudek, 2006b). Viewed from a Levinasian perspective, the novel, it is concluded, has the potential to spark an ethical imagination that goes beyond empathy and compassion to action, that is, to the assumption of responsibility for and obligation to the Other. When applied to some detention centre picturebooks (Dudek, 2006a), this ethics has drawn attention to possibilities for engaging with alterity in everyday cultural practice. Again the focus is on the action that the non-refugee person takes in response to their encounter with the alterity of the refugee.

The application of the ethics of responsibility to picturebooks for the purposes of this study is informed by a classroom study conducted in Canada (Ippolito, 2010). That study entailed analysis of a cluster of phenomena relating to curricula, compensatory practices, discourse on languages, resourcing, and the choice of language for communication between bilingual teachers and students in linguistically diverse classrooms. The analyses were conducted within a Levinasian framework which construed “speech” as “interlocution [that] binds... teachers... to a relation of responsibility for their students” (Ippolito, 2010, p. 109). In other words, it was assumed that teachers have obligations to students in all their linguistic alterity; the language minority student should not be reduced to the opposite of the linguistically dominant, to their difference from the dominant self, but should be ‘heard’ in their separateness from that self. From this perspective, the presence of minority languages in a classroom potentially opens educational practice up to alterity. Further, through exposure to minority languages, a particular teacherly self might come into existence and be called into the moral goodness of responsibility for and obligation to linguistic Others. However, the study found little in the way of evidence of breaks with Anglophone sameness; there was little opening up to linguistic alterity.

The Levinasian perspective developed for the Canadian classroom research (Ippolito, 2010) informed this study of refugee-themed picturebooks which feature linguistic diversity. From the perspective of the ethics of responsibility, the opening up or closing down of interlocutors in conditions of linguistic diversity to the alterity of language variation is analytically salient. These phenomena indicate breaks with the sameness of Anglophone contexts or the perpetuation of such; they indicate responsibility for and obligation to linguistic Others or the absence of such.

The study

The illustrative analyses presented here were conducted on five refugee-themed picturebooks published in the one social, cultural and historical context, namely contemporary Australia. These books are part of a sub-genre that has developed rapidly in western nations during a period in which humanitarian immigration is amongst the most fissiparous of social issues. In Australia, the 1990s saw asylum-seekers construed in public discourse as threats to national identity, cohesion, sovereignty and security. And with this, the official welcome accorded Vietnamese ‘boatpeople’ in the 1970s gave way to a regimen of ‘border protection’ that has continued to this day, especially in reaction to Islamic terrorism. During these years, anxiety about the growth of the Muslim population, in part, through humanitarian immigration, has periodically erupted into violence (Keddie, 2014). These developments have been accompanied by ongoing discussion as to whether or how Australia’s policies of official multiculturalism, first adopted in the 1970s, are adequate to nation-building; indeed, the very term ‘multiculturalism’ was dropped from national social policy for a while during the 2000s (Fleras, 2009; Keddie, 2014). It is in these conditions that refugee-themed picturebooks have proliferated (Dudek, 2006a,b).

Since the 1990s, the cultural field in Australia has been a site of literary activism through the vehicle of the picturebook amongst other genres. Developments in humanitarian immigration policy and the accompanying public discourse have sparked a broad-based refugee and asylum-seeker advocacy movement that includes community and religious organisations, medical and health professionals, lawyers and judges, actors and artists, and politicians and minor political parties (Flowers & Chodkiewicz, 2004). In this context, some writers, illustrators and publishers have sought to create an alternative consciousness of humanitarian immigration in children “who represent the next generation with the ability to reverse... current wrongs” (Dudek, 2006a, p. 38).

Amongst the cultural workers involved in this movement have been teachers of refugee students (Lofthouse & Ingpen, 2007), former child refugees (Do, Do & Whatley, 2012), the children of refugees (Gervay & Pignataro, 2012), and community organisations (Cavouros, 2007). This overtly political work is not unusual: the picturebook is routinely deployed in the education of the upcoming generation as a means to one or another socially transformative end.

The five picturebooks analysed for their transformative potential in the study were selected from a larger corpus that was put together through searches of recent publications on refugee-themed literature (e.g., Dudek, 2006a,b; Mudiyansele, 2014), publisher websites, the website of the Children's Book Council of Australia, and refugee websites. For inclusion, books had to be (1) picturebooks as distinct from novels, (2) suitable for primary school-aged children, (3) refugee-themed in the broad sense established earlier in this article; and (4) published in Australia; additionally, they had to (5) feature linguistic diversity in some fashion. The final selection of books was:

- *The Little Refugee* (Do, Do & Whatley, 2011);
- *Ships in the Field* (Gervay & Pignataro, 2012);
- *Ziba Came on a Boat* (Lofthouse & Ingpen, 2007);
- *My Two Blankets* (Kobald & Blackwood, 2014); and
- *A True Person* (Marin & Grantford, 2007).

With respect to selection criterion 5, the books all featured linguistic diversity in at least one of two ways. Specifically, refugees' language (English or otherwise) was present in the linguistic text of the books themselves; and/or the books represented refugee characters engaged in communication in translingual interactions.

During analysis, the picturebooks were read or viewed in their complexity as multimodal artefacts (Mourão, 2012). The analysis focused on meanings made possible

by the configuration of semiotic modes in the books. Working within the tradition of multiliteracies, picturebook reading was understood as a meaning-making process that may entail a multiplicity of modes, often in multimodal configurations: oral linguistic, written linguistic, audio, spatial, gestural, visual and tactile (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). In these terms, the texts of the picturebooks selected for this study might be understood as configurations of semiotic resources drawn from the grammars of the visual mode (image), the spatial mode (layout) and the linguistic mode (written language, sometimes representing oral language as direct speech).

Consistent with the multiliteracies perspective (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), the linguistic mode was understood in multilingual terms, specifically, in terms of ‘translingualism’. From a translingual perspective (Canagarajah, 2014), communities in these times of late modern globalisation are viewed as ‘contact zones’ within which languages are ‘mobile semiotic resources’. These resources become meaningful when interlocutors construe particular performances in particular communicative situations *as* meaningful. In translingual situations to which interlocutors bring a multiplicity of language variants, this entails a performative competence that is enabled by a cooperative disposition to meaning making. This disposition consists of awareness of language variation, a pro-diversity social orientation, and strategies for negotiating and learning to make meaning (e.g., letting moments of incomprehension pass or rendering particular language variations ‘normal’). It is a disposition that may be present in multilinguals, here defined as people who speak English as an additional language in an English dominant western society and may claim ownership of the language. It may be present also in English native speakers, here defined as members of the group in English dominant western nations that speaks English as a first and often only language, and has historically claimed ownership of the language (Canagarajah, 2014).

During the analyses conducted for the study, the modal form and meanings of each opening of the picturebooks and the picturebook peritext were analysed. An ‘opening’ is a double page spread in a picturebook (Mourão, 2012). Openings are typically un-numbered; as this was the case with the picturebooks used in this study, page numbers are not provided for citations from the books in the analyses presented below. The ‘peritext’ of a picturebook is the cover, endpapers and other components integral to the meaning making potential of the picturebook as an artefact (Mourão, 2012).

The analyses presented below rest on two assumptions about children’s learning during picturebook reading. First, in accord with the traditions of philosophy for children (e.g., Cam, 1995), it is assumed that representations of characters engaged in communication of linguistic diversity provide models of behaviour that are curricular resources for ethical education. Second, in accord with the traditions of the LA movement as developed in recent research on foreign language picturebooks in early years education (e.g., Mourão & Lourenço, 2015) and dual language picturebooks books in kindergarten (Naqvi, Thorne, Pfitscher, Nordstokke & McKeough, 2013), it is assumed that even young children can attend to the form of languages and dialects, as distinct from only the meaning, in the course of explicit instruction.

Findings

Three findings emerge from the analyses of the selected picturebooks. One is that the books represent an Anglophone sameness in the everyday life of the classroom, detention centre and community; in this vision of the world refugees need to work hard at learning English and more proficient English speakers should help them and do so kindly. A second finding is that there is some representation in the books of what might be understood as an ethics of responsibility for alterity in conditions of intralanguage

translinguality; in this vision of the world speakers with a standard accent engage more with the meanings than with the form of the speech of those whose accent marks them as linguistic others in the English dominant immigrant nation of the west. A third finding is that some of the books may generate moments of translingual contact because of the mobile semiotic resources present in the linguistic texts of the books.

Representing the monolingual sameness of everyday life

The Little Refugee (Do et al., 2012) represents the linguistically diverse classroom as a place of monolingual sameness. In this memoir, Anh Do tells of his early years living happily in Vietnam, a perilous asylum-seeking voyage with his parents and brother at war's end, and the family's post-resettlement life in Australia. At a time of intense anxiety about the non-assimilability of refugees in Australia, Do's is a story of transition from "a faraway country... a crazy place" to suburban life in "this beautiful country" where "everything would turn out okay in the end". In the text, 'the end' sees Do named school captain for Year 5 Blue class. In the bionotes provided in the peritext, it is pointed out further that Do "grew up to become one of Australia's best-loved comedians" and went on to author *The Happiest Refugee*, a memoir voted the 2011 Australian Book of the Year. This is a book rich in opportunities for exploring refugee issues; it is the representation of linguistic diversity in school which is of interest here.

While Do's transition to Australia 'turns out okay in the end', there were difficulties along the way – language amongst these. In addition to the misery of being picked on for having "smelly food" and for not having "the right school uniform", Do recalls not understanding the teacher because "I couldn't speak English very well". To make his parents happy, Do "tried hard at school". In particular, he "started to learn English properly" despite it being "hard at first". He did all his homework "each afternoon" and "slowly... started to do better at school" and "to make a few friends".

The points of analytic interest in this research, it will be recalled, are the presence of refugees' language in the text and the representation of communication in conditions of linguistic diversity. *The Little Refugee* is notable for what is not present: neither Vietnamese nor the young refugee's beginner English enter into the verbal text. Also notable is what is said about that English: by implication it is appraised negatively as 'not proper'. There is, then, no sense of alterity being welcomed into Australian school life; indeed, it seems that linguistic alterity was a problem, the resolution of which demanded relentless work on the part of Do. This situation has ethical implications: when the sameness of the English language learning environment remains unbroken, the possibility of encounter with linguistic Otherness on the part of the monolingual English self is precluded. There is no impetus to a relationship of responsibility in the face of linguistic Otherness. This representation resonates with that found in empirical research in Canadian classrooms some three decades later (Ippolito, 2010). This finding is, perhaps, unsurprising for the *The Little Refugee* is a memoir of the author's post-resettlement life in an Australian school in the 1980s, a time when notions of assimilation were still being challenged by the first wave of multiculturalism.

Do's picturebook is a valuable curricular resource for its account of the resilience and effort by which some minority language children achieve success through education. It is a story of investment in the English language capabilities and social identity crucial for life chances in an English-dominant western society (Ippolito, 2010). This is not uncommon in refugee-themed children's literature: detention centre novels, for instance, routinely close with the refugee character working or studying diligently or promising to do so (Dudek, 2006a). But such books do not afford opportunities for going beyond assimilatory notions of linguistic Sameness; they do not offer potential for developing an ethics adequate to the everyday encounters with alterity, linguistic or

otherwise, which are prompting challenges to established understandings of multiculturalism in Australia at present. Given this, *The Little Refugee* could be used to raise questions about the absence of the refugee child's first language and about the onus placed on that child to learn 'proper' English. There is potential here for reflection on the Anglophone sameness, the monolinguality, of schooling.

There is similar potential in the fictional picturebook, *My Two Blankets* (Kobald & Blackwood, 2014). This book is notable for what might be understood as 'modal metaphor': a refugee child's language is present in the visual rather than the verbal text. This book tells the story of a girl who revels in the nickname 'Cartwheel' bestowed on her in recognition of her favourite pastime in her African village. But "[t]hen came the war" to the village, and, as the girl puts it, "Auntie didn't call me Cartwheel any more".

Cartwheel and her aunt were re-settled in an Australian city where "[n]obody spoke like I did". For Cartwheel, being in the linguistic world of her new home "was like "standing under a waterfall of strange sounds." The sounds were "cold" and the girl felt "alone" and "like I wasn't me any more". The images in the book represent a language that is new to Cartwheel raining down in public places: a cacophony of objects from that new world fly out of people's mouths and onto the heads of Cartwheel and her aunt. When she is in her Australian home Cartwheel wraps herself in her first language; the visual image is of a warm blanket into which are woven African objects.

One day, Cartwheel and her aunt meet a local girl and her mother when they are out walking in a park. The girl befriends Cartwheel and speaks to her in the language of her new country, an experience that is initially like "being back under the cold waterfall". Over time, the girl teaches Cartwheel the new language, bringing her words to learn which she makes her practise over and over again. Although it is sometimes fun for the girls ("we laughed") this learning experience is not without distress for

Cartwheel (“I wanted to cry”). Over time, however, Cartwheel weaves a blanket from her new words, a blanket that is initially “thin and small” but ultimately “warm and soft”. A succession of images shows Cartwheel adding objects to the new blanket. Eventually, Cartwheel forgets “about the cold and lonely waterfall” and comes to realise that she will always be herself irrespective of the blanket she uses. The book closes with an image of Cartwheel merrily engaging in her namesake pastime while her new friend looks on.

My Two Blankets represents attitudes and behaviours by which children can assist refugee peers to enter into life in an English dominant western society, not alternatives to the monolingual sameness of that life. The kindness of the girl in the park is beyond doubt. Indeed, it makes a sharp contrast to the ‘help’ provided to another refugee girl, Zallah, in the detention centre picturebook, *A True Person* (Marin & Grantford, 2007). After a voyage of asylum from a country that was “dry and hot and sandy”, presumably Afghanistan, Zallah was detained at the ‘Centre’ in an Australian landscape that was also “dry and hot and sandy”. At the Centre some fellow child detainees treated Zallah unkindly; they “tried to teach her English, which was the language of her new home” but “the way they laughed... made her think the words they taught her were probably rude”. Under the guise of helping Zallah, then, the other children seemed to be imposing humiliation and suffering on her. The contrast with Cartwheel’s friend from the park is stark and would be useful for instruction in an ethics of empathy. However, Cartwheel’s African language remains a language of home and does not enter into her interactions with her friend from the park. This is a point of contrast with the picturebooks, selected for the study, that represent a model of responsibility for linguistic alterity or incorporate language variation into the verbal

text. Both semiotic moves are rich in potential for developing an ethics of responsibility for linguistic alterity.

Modelling responsibility for intralanguage alterity

Ships in the Field (Gervay & Pignataro, 2012) represents what might be understood as a model of responsibility for negotiating variation within English. This picturebook tells the story of a family of three – Ma, Papa and young daughter – that has fled a war in Europe. The story is narrated by the daughter. It tells of the family’s past in “the old country, before it was broken” and of their life “here” (presumably Australia) with its pleasures as well as its traumatic memories, sense of loss – and experience of linguistic otherness.

A major event in the story is a family picnic: “Sundays are picnic days”. On the particular Sunday recounted in the picturebook the family drives to the countryside. Papa, who “grew up in a village” in Europe, points out sheep in the paddocks: “Look at the ships in the field”. The daughter and her toy dog, Brownie, “giggle”: “Papa, you mean sheep”. “Yes, the ships”, Papa confirms with a wiggle of his moustache. This exchange may be understood as representing learning strategies and language awareness integral to the translingual disposition of cooperation (Canagarajah, 2014). The daughter scaffolds Papa’s learning, presumably on the basis of her socialisation with native speakers, while Papa, his moustache wiggling merrily, seems to model an awareness of the mobility and negotiability of language variants.

After the exchange with Papa, the daughter-narrator addresses the reader, highlighting the linguistic intolerance and parochialism found in the broader English dominant society: “Brownie looks at me sadly. He hates it when other people laugh at the way Papa talks. I hate it too”. Watched by her silent mother, the girl begins singing and Ma and Papa join her in a rousing rendition of the English nursery rhyme: “Baa,

baa, black ships, have you any wool...”. The acceptance of language variation here stands in sharp contrast to the linguistic discrimination experienced by the father in the absence of translingual dispositions on the part of his interlocutors. Understood so, *Ships in the Field* is rich in potential for exploring an ethics of responsibility for intralanguage alterity, specifically, non-standard phonology. This potential lies in the way that characters are represented negotiating linguistic diversity. Some of the potential of the books lies, however, in the translinguality of the verbal text itself.

Picturebook reading as a moment of translingual contact

Variations on standard English are found in the verbal texts of *Ships in the Field* and *A True Person*. As described above, the verbal text of *Ships in the Field* incorporates the phonology of a multilingual who arrived in Australia as an adult refugee from Europe: “Look at the ships in the field’, Papa says”. This wording is part of some sophisticated cross-modal semiotic play that is critical to the meaning that might be made from the text.

To elaborate, Papa’s comment is written on the top right hand corner of one of the openings of the book (see: <http://www.booktopia.com.au/ships-in-the-field-susanne-gervay/prod9781921665233.html>). It is superimposed on an image of sheep in a field. If the reader scans the opening from left to right as is conventional during the reading of an English book, they will see a full page image of refugees streaming through a shattered European city. This image blends into an image of three ships arranged vertically from top to bottom on the left hand side of the right hand page of the opening. These ships may represent three moments in the voyage Papa took from treacherous to calmer seas, from war torn Europe to Australia. This image blends into the image of the sheep in the field that takes up the right hand side of the right hand page of the opening. This latter image would seem to represent the place where Papa takes Ma and his daughter for their

Sunday picnic, but it also evokes Papa's rural European home. There is more than one way to read this semiotically complex opening; this is a book rich in curricular resource potential for making meanings about the refugee experience. In any case, the making of those meanings is a moment of language contact that calls forth translingual disposition on the part of the reader.

In *A True Person* a few words in the non-standard English of a refugee that are incorporated into the verbal text of the picturebook are likewise integral to the meanings that might be made from the book. As noted above, this picturebook tells the story of Zallah, an asylum seeker who is detained in a detention centre in the Australian desert before being released into community detention. At the Centre, Zallah is befriended by Mwalo, an African asylum-seeker. In the course of conversation about his detention, Mwalo says: "I been here two years... But I be out soon cause I a true person". Through Mwalo's speech a non-standard variant of English enters into the verbal text of the picturebook. The meaning Mwalo makes is integral to the story. The notion of "a true person" introduced by Mwalo refers to an asylum seeker who has all their papers. Zallah's mother disagrees, saying that a true person is one who is seen and loved by others. The final opening of the book shows Zallah enjoying such an experience when a woman waves back to her during her bus trip into an Australian city after her release from the Centre. As explained in an endnote in the peritext, only women and children were eligible for release into the community; men were held in detention centres. As with *Ships in the Field*, then, this picturebook entails a moment of language contact that calls forth some translingual disposition from the reader.

Where *Ships in the Field* and *A True Person* entail contact with variants of the one language, *Ziba Came on a Boat* (Lofthouse & Ingpen, 2007) entails a moment of contact across languages. This picturebook tells the story of Ziba and her mother who

take a perilous asylum seeking voyage to Australia from Afghanistan. The book depicts Ziba's happy life with her parents and extended family in the village, the cessation of schooling as "[t]he darkness spread, seeping into the quiet corners of the peaceful village", the flight with her mother from the war, and then the voyage on a boat that "rose and fell, rose and fell, across an endless sea..." (ellipsis in the original). In the penultimate opening of the picturebook, after depictions of the perils of the voyage, along with Ziba's dream of a warm welcome to Australia, Ziba's mother whispers a single word: "*Azadi... Freedom*" (italics in the original). For Ziba, the dream of azadi is a dream of being able to "live without fear... free to learn and laugh and dance again". As with *Ships in the Night* and *A True Person*, a moment of language contact calling forth some translingual disposition from the reader is integral to *Ziba Came on a Boat*.

Conclusions

In the study reported here, refugee-themed picturebooks featuring linguistic diversity were analysed in terms of a Levinasian ethics of responsibility in order to probe the possibilities of a supplement or alternative to the ethics of empathy long established in the literary component of English. The analyses treated the books as multimodal artefacts, bringing translingual understandings of the linguistic modes to the picturebook texts. Findings related to (1) representations of the monolingual sameness of everyday life in Australia as an English dominant society, (2) representation of a model of responsibility for alterity within English, and (3) the translingual disposition called forth by language variation in the linguistic text. These findings suggest that an ethics of responsibility for linguistic alterity does hold out promise for tapping the curricular resource potential of refugee themed picture books for embedding ethics into the language awareness component sometimes incorporated into the subject of English in English dominant western countries.

As noted by Qoyyimah (this issue), classroom instruction involves both a discourse of content in which students are to be instructed (instructional discourse) and a discourse on how that content is to be transmitted in the course of instruction (regulative or moral discourse). In this view, grounded in the sociology of Basil Bernstein (1996), ethics may be transmitted by either discourse: it may be content of the instruction or it may be built into activities as dispositions and behaviours by which students learn that content. As analysed here, the refugee-themed picturebooks selected for this study, provide representations of the monolingual sameness of everyday life in Australia but also models of responsibility for linguistic alterity. These representations might all be made object of instruction at the intersection of ethical understanding with the language variation component of the subject of English. The picturebooks also provide meaning-making experiences that might call translingual dispositions forth from the reader in the course of that instruction. Use of the picturebooks therefore holds out the possibility of embedding an ethics of responsibility for linguistic diversity into the regulative discourse in the course of that instruction. In short, the books are rich in curricular resource potential at the intersection of ethical understanding and the subject of English. This potential warrants attention.

An approach that grounds reason about diversity in an ethics rather than a politics is valuable at this time of intense national and global politicking around refugee issues. That it does so without reducing the Other to the opposite of the native English speaking self or to their difference from that self is helpful given increasing social polarisation within linguistically and culturally diverse English dominant western societies. The contribution of this study has been to extend that ethical approach from linguistically diverse classrooms to picturebooks which feature linguistic diversity and from the variation between English and other languages to the variation within English.

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