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EXPLORING MĀORI-TURI-TANGA IN NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Given the centrality of language to identity, how do Deaf people who whakapapa Māori signal their identity in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL)? Previous research has documented that Māori Deaf people seek greater cultural and linguistic connection with te ao Māori and to position themselves as *Turi Māori* in the intersection between revitalisation of te reo Māori and the recognition of NZSL in society. However, the situated language practices of Māori NZSL users associated with this kaupapa have yet to be a focus of detailed research. Through analysis of NZSL discourse data and Māori Deaf participants' own reflections on their use of NZSL, this study considers how language practices may contribute to signalling *Māori-turi-tanga* (Māori Deafness). Empirically, the article documents how NZSL neologisms that express Māori concepts draw on multimodal linguistic resources from both signed and spoken languages.

Keywords

identity, Māori Deaf, mouthing, neologisms, NZSL, sociolinguistic variation

Introduction

Given the centrality of language to identity, how do Deaf people who whakapapa Māori signal their identity in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL)? Previous research has documented that Māori Deaf people seek greater connection with te ao Māori and some aspire to differentiate their ethnic identity linguistically (R. McKee et al., 2007; Smiler, 2004; Smiler & McKee, 2007). However, situated language practices associated with this kaupapa have yet to be a focus of detailed research. This study investigates how NZSL practices might contribute to signalling *Māori-turi-tanga* (Māori Deafness) through analysing language-use data and Māori Deaf participants' metalinguistic ideas about their use of NZSL, supporting the following often-cited whakataukī:

> Ko taku reo taku ohooho, ko taku reo taku mapihi mauria.
>
> My language is my awakening, my language is the window to my soul.

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Background to NZSL

As a backdrop to this study, we first outline some general characteristics of signed languages, the development of NZSL, and outcomes of contact between signed and spoken languages.

Signed languages that are used in Deaf communities evolve among a critical mass of Deaf people through interaction over historical time. In urbanised societies, this process has historically been centred in deaf education institutions that create collective, enduring spaces where deaf people socialise over multiple generations. Sign language vocabulary and grammar are built on visual and manual elements arising from the modality in which Deaf people perceive the world and express themselves most easily. Decades of research show that the linguistic structures of signed languages are systematic and different in nature from spoken languages, and are thus considered independent languages (Padden, 2024).

Signed languages are internationally diverse, being specific to a location, culture and history of transmission. Furthermore, they do not necessarily correspond with the territorial or political boundaries of spoken languages. For example, New Zealand and the United States of America (USA) are both English-dominant countries, but their respective national sign languages are not mutually intelligible.

The NZSL community began to form after the establishment of a residential school for deaf children in Christchurch in 1880 (Collins-Ahlgren, 1989), later followed by residential schools in Feilding and Auckland. These schools brought together deaf children from around the country. A sign language developed in the playground and hostels, incorporating idiosyncratic signs that children brought from their home repertoires, signs created with peers at school, and apparently some British signs acquired outside of school (Collins-Ahlgren, 1989). The local language that emerged over a century became known as NZSL after linguistic documentation began in the mid-1980s (Collins-Ahlgren, 1989; Levitt, 1985).

To our knowledge there is no documented evidence of an Indigenous sign language in precolonial New Zealand (Forman, 2003). Postcolonially, Māori deaf children were assimilated into a hegemonically European deaf education system (Faircloth et al., 2015; Forman, 2003; Smiler & McKee, 2007) in which mātauranga and tikanga Māori were absent. Moreover, whakapapa knowledge was generally inaccessible in home environments because of inherent communication barriers for deaf children in hearing whānau, exacerbated by oralist education policy that advised against using sign language (Flitcroft & Le Vaillant, 2024). The state's role in the cultural alienation of Māori deaf children in education and structural inequities in their life outcomes is the subject of a current claim brought on behalf of Māori deaf people (Smiler et al., 2023; Waitangi Tribunal, 2019). Census data from 2023 indicates that Māori comprise 20.7% (or 1,608) of 5,382 NZSL users who have some degree of hearing loss (information based on a customised data request to Stats NZ Data by authors; Stats NZ Data are licensed for re-use under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence).

The overlap of emerging Deaf cultural-linguistic consciousness with the renaissance of te reo Māori empowered Māori Deaf people from the 1990s to claim intersectional identity within the Deaf community and te ao Māori. Conscious attention to language practices has played a part in signifying this repositioning. This is exemplified in Figure 1, which shows a Māori Deaf group at a protest hīkoi in 2004 carrying their banner reading "Ngati Turi". In the film footage of this event, Māori Deaf kaumātua Patrick Thompson describes their identity alignments: "We are Deaf, but not the same as Pākehā Deaf. We are Māori. But Deaf and disabled—they are different" (Māori Television, 2004, 33:50).

Sociolinguists Bucholtz and Hall (2005) regard identity "as a centrally linguistic phenomenon" (p. 586) that is fluid and contextual, enacted and appropriately analysed through the use of language in interaction, rather than an immutable psychological construct defined by social categories. Smiler's (2004) research attests Māori Deaf people's own perceptions of contextual fluidity in their identities. Adopting this perspective, this research explores ideologies and practices concerning how Māori Deaf people are using NZSL and other communicative resources to position themselves as Māori. For example, the use of an open-handed pointing variant for person reference as a Māori Deaf signing style is discussed in Simchowitz and McKee (2025). This article focuses on mouthing and lexical innovation (neologisms and other strategies) as forms of bimodal language contact that potentially carry social meaning, as we introduce in the next section.

Contact between spoken and signed languages

Deaf sign language communities are surrounded by spoken languages, ensuring contact between oral and manual language modalities (Quinto-Pozos &



FIGURE 1 Ngāti Turi group with banner in hīkoi. Source: Māori Television (2004).

Adam, 2015). Bimodal language contact typically results in transfer of spoken language elements into sign languages through fingerspelling, mouthing with signs, and loan translation of words and phrases from speech (Quinto-Pozos & Adam, 2015). In New Zealand, a century-long ban on sign language in deaf education (Dugdale, 2000; Ladd, 2003) meant that teaching emphasised speech and lipreading, involving the use of pronounced lip patterns that has left traces in the mouthing of NZSL signers. Mouthing is defined as the "voiceless articulation of spoken words while producing signs" (Quinto-Pozos & Adam, 2013, p. 381). Mouthing simultaneously with signs is regarded as a form of code-mixing or code-blending since it combines elements from a signed and a spoken language (Quinto-Pozos & Adam, 2013).

Kusters et al. (2017) note that linguistic resources are differentially accessible to Deaf people, who do not have complete sensory access to spoken languages. In plurilingual contexts, research has shown that the semiotic repertoires of Deaf signers reveal complex "translingual" blends (Jaraisy & Stamp, 2024). For example, in the USA, Deaf Mexican migrants who know two national sign languages pair Spanish word mouthing with American signs and English mouthing with Mexican signs (Quinto-Pozos, 2002). Similar bimodal alternation to enact identity alignment is described among Indigenous Deaf people in Arctic Canada (Schuit, 2012), in Java (Palfreyman, 2020) and with Black ASL signers in the USA (Lucas et al., 2015).

Māori loan words are a distinctive feature of New Zealand English (NZE) (Degani, 2010; Macalister, 2007), and their use may be socially motivated to signal alignment with Māori values (King, 1995). Unsurprisingly, language or cultural contact manifests in NZSL signs for Māori concepts recorded in NZSL dictionaries—exemplified in Figure 2 (Kennedy et al., 1997; D. McKee et al., 2011). However, since signs with Māori reference occur in a visual-gestural rather than oral modality, they are not direct loans in NZSL in the way that Māori words are directly borrowed into NZE. These signs have developed within the structures of NZSL to express Māori meanings.

Sign language interpreting in Māori settings and in other public contexts is a site of contact between Māori and NZSL, creating translational pressure, especially where there is lexical or conceptual inequivalence in NZSL. The growing availability of interpreters since the 1990s has facilitated Deaf people's participation in an expanded range of contexts. However, access to te reo Māori domains remains limited because there are fewer than five qualified interpreters who are fluent to the level needed to work between te reo Māori, NZSL and English (Vale & McKee, 2020), and there are no widely used systems in place for teaming between NZSL–English and Māori–English interpreters. Nevertheless, an increase in Māori

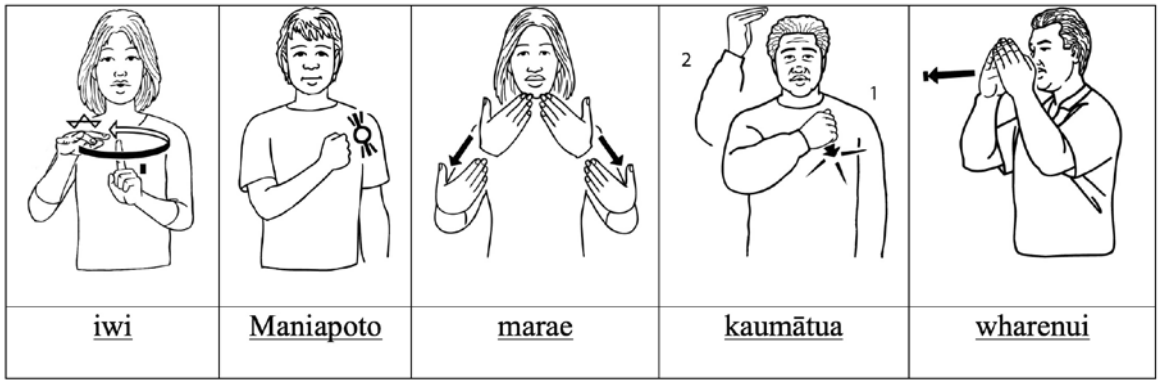

FIGURE 2 Examples of established NZSL signs with Māori reference



FIGURE 3 NZSL sentence with equivalent English–Māori glosses

Deaf participation in Māori-centred events in recent times has boosted their desire to access and express mātauranga Māori concepts, and to produce specific types of discourse (such as karakia and whaikōrero) in NZSL, to affiliate with Māori identity and activities.

Before introducing the research, we address a common conflation of two misconceptions that prompt the frequently asked question, "Is there Māori sign language?". The first misconception is that signed languages are corollaries of spoken languages, and the second is that ethnicity necessarily corresponds with language identity. With regard to the second, knowledge of te reo Māori is often taken to be central to Māori identity (Te Huia, 2015, p. 19), and intentions from outside the Deaf community to support this (assumed) ethnolinguistic identity in Māori Deaf people is often based on the (first) misperception that NZSL aligns with, or represents, spoken English.

In fact, sign systems devised to correspond with the words and grammar of spoken languages have been created for pedagogical (literacy teaching) purposes in many countries, but these are rarely initiated or adopted by Deaf communities and are often politically resisted as hegemonic language interventions (Adam, 2015). Artificial manual codes for spoken languages (with names such as Signed English, Signed Swedish, Signed Arabic) lack the visual grammar of natural sign languages and their use is problematic for deaf children who do not have auditory access to a foundation in the vocabulary and grammar of the relevant spoken language (Scott & Henner, 2020). Before NZSL was acknowledged as a bona fide language, this kind of artificial signing system, Australasian Signed English, was introduced into deaf education in New Zealand, in 1979. A similar intention, to represent the form of a spoken language, has motivated previous attempts to devise a manual code for elements of spoken Māori (R. McKee et al., 2007, p. 50). This is described as far back as 1997 in *Talking Hands, Listening Eyes: The History of the Deaf Association of New Zealand* (Dugdale, 2001), which documents a university's proposal to devise and teach "Sign Language for Māori". The Māori Council of the Deaf Association resolved in 1998 not to support the proposed course since it was not Deaf led or community informed. The conflation of (a novel form of) sign language and spoken Māori continues to surface in media headlines today, as documented in Simchowitz and McKee (2025).

As between spoken languages, translational equivalence between a signed and a spoken language is based on meaning, not form. That is,

a message can be translated between NZSL, Māori and English. For example, at word level, the NZSL sign glossed as "taonga" can also be translated as "valuable, sacred, treasure". At sentence level, the sequence shown in Figure 3 translates into English as "My wife has a well-paid job", or into Māori as "He mahi utu pai taku wahine". The meaning across all three is equivalent, but the structure of the sentence (as glossed in Figure 3), is neither English nor Māori; it is NZSL, including cues on the face and head that are part of the visual grammar.

Next, we outline the approach, process and data for this research.

Methodology

The methodology of this study sits within the scope of interactional sociolinguistics, which takes a discourse-based approach to investigating "how specific linguistic codes or forms are connected to identities (both individual and collective and at all levels) as well as sociocultural roles and stances" (Jaffe, 2013, p. 216). Within this, a linguistic ethnography approach (Jaffe, 2013) was adopted to explore how specific NZSL practices or forms are connected with Māori Deaf motivations concerning identity. Linguistic ethnography methodology aims to identify salient language features or practices and to interpret their significance by triangulating various data sources; a methodological challenge is the selection of *salient* features and deciding what to pay attention to or ask. This study progressed from observation of language use across recorded NZSL data (informed by the researchers' real-world exposure to similar contexts), to identification and micro-analysis of recurring features in that data. Descriptive analysis of language behaviour was complemented by data from participant discussions to identify their beliefs and values about what NZSL practices signify in particular contexts. Details of data collection and analysis methods are explained in the following section, "Research procedure".

A Kaupapa Māori research approach is applicable to methods appropriate for working with Deaf community members (O'Brien, 2017). Nepe (1991) states that the Māori language sits at the core of Kaupapa Māori and that knowledge should be shared "exclusively" in te reo Māori. However, Mahuika (2008) challenges this language-specific requirement, emphasising that "these views hold the potential to dis-empower and dis-enfranchise those who may already be marginalised within the mainstream because they are Māori, yet struggle to find acceptance from within their own culture because they are not Māori enough" (p. 8). This study aims to record language practices Māori Deaf people use to assert their mana motuhake within NZSL, contributing to understanding of Deaf mātauranga Māori. Since Kaupapa Māori stems from struggles for tino rangatiratanga (Pihama, 2010), this study seeks to support Māori Deaf people in their assertion of tino rangatira-turi-tanga.

Practical elements of a Kaupapa Māori approach adopted in this study include strengthening relationships with stakeholders, requesting permission to analyse data and undertaking focus group interviews led by a Māori Deaf facilitator. Additionally, this approach sets expectations that research will benefit the community studied (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Since Māori Deaf people are currently engaged in defining and claiming their Indigenous Deaf identity, their participation in this research contributes to the development of that discourse, with discussion of Māori Deaf language practices contributing to construction of Deaf mātauranga Māori. This study centred Māori Deaf people in the research by way of seeking their explanations of language produced by themselves and their peers. This collaborative approach aimed to mitigate the risk of objectification as identified in previous research with Deaf ethnic minority groups (Hill & McCaskill, 2016; Smiler, 2006). Additionally, Māori research students have emphasised the importance of research being accessible to the Māori community (Pihama, 2010). To that effect, at the completion of this research, a summary was presented and recorded in NZSL at Rūaumoko Marae, presented in NZSL to a Māori Deaf advisory board, and at the 6th National Māori Deaf hui in 2023.

The authors came to this study as hearing (in other words, not Deaf), long-standing NZSL users. We hold professional roles and privileges as interpreters, researchers and teachers, and we have Deaf spouses. We introduce our positionality in relation to this research below:

> Melissa: Sharing a similar experience to many Māori people, I was not raised on my ancestral homelands, immersed in traditional cultural practices and language. At university, I embarked on a journey of reclamation, learning te reo Māori and taking up NZSL for the second time. As my Māori identity journey converged with the Deaf world, a wonderful Māori Deaf man helped me feel at ease as I searched for ways to reconnect with my Māoritanga. Michael Wi taught at Rūaumoko Marae, located on the grounds of the

national deaf education centre. We are both from Ngāti Maniapoto and when he addressed Deaf students he would, without exception, mention proudly that he and I were from the same iwi. While Rūaumoko is not my marae and I am not a member of the Deaf community, he made me feel at home. These days, I continue to learn more about myself as a Māori woman in Aotearoa New Zealand and have remained close with the Deaf community that welcomed me some 17 years ago.

Rachel: As a hearing Pākehā child in the 1970s in Kirikiriroa, I benefited from the opportunity to learn te reo Māori at intermediate and high school from teachers who were pioneering the teaching of te reo in mainstream schools. My exposure to these Māori teachers, classmates and cultural experiences instilled awareness of my tauiwi identity and an appreciation that language is linked to the mana of individuals and community. As a university graduate, I joined the first training course for NZSL interpreters in 1985 and then worked as an interpreter in the Deaf community, which was linguistically and socially marginalised at that time. Wanting to contribute to change, I went on to postgraduate study and professional interpreting experience in the USA and returned to Aotearoa to work as a researcher and teacher in NZSL applied linguistics alongside Deaf colleagues. My early exposure to te ao Māori helped me to notice the intersectional position of Māori Deaf people in the NZSL community and inclined me to collaborate with Māori students, colleagues and Deaf community members from a stance of allyship.

This positionality is important to bear in mind. We emphasise that we are hearing researchers working with a specific group of people and a small dataset, and the signs and practices identified here cannot be generalised to all Māori Deaf people. Additionally, we are not endorsing any particular signs by documenting them here; the study highlights that ways of expressing Māori concepts in NZSL are variable and emergent. We also note that the use of Māori-related neologisms and Māori mouthing is not necessarily confined to Māori users of NZSL. We predict that it will take some time for these practices to stabilise and be adopted by wider circles of Māori Deaf signers and the NZSL community generally.

Research procedure

The study used two key methods: descriptive feature analysis of existing recordings of language produced by Māori Deaf signers, and inductive thematic analysis of focus group discussions in which Māori Deaf participants reflected on excerpts from the language samples and responded to prompt discussion questions. The relationship between the two datasets is diagrammed in Figure 4.

Undertaking research in a Deaf context and guided by Kaupapa Māori principles, it was imperative to work with Māori Deaf stakeholders. The rarity of Deaf people participating as researchers (Wilson & Winiarczyk, 2014) made this even more important. Bringing Māori Deaf people into the research process also resituates the researcher as a collaborator (Mellinger, 2020) and creates a "research whānau" (Bishop, 1994; Irwin, 1994). Different parts of the research whānau worked together across four stages. The first stage was connecting with a Māori Deaf facilitator and receiving their input on research questions,

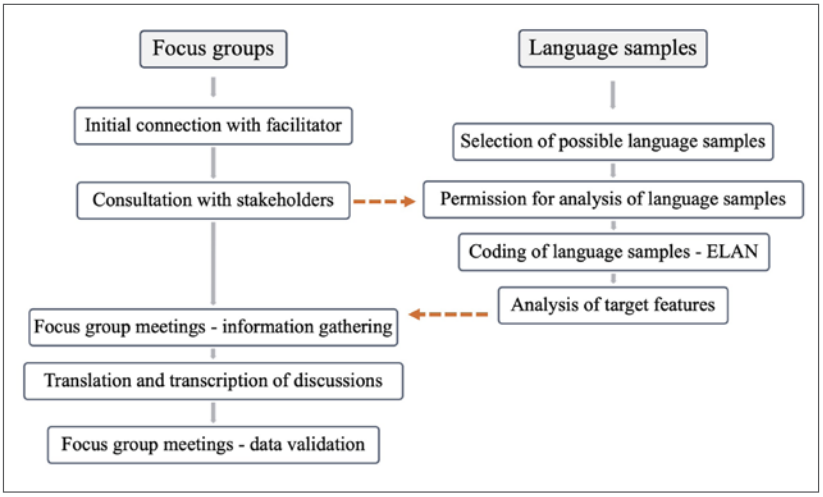

FIGURE 4 Diagram of research procedure timeline.

selected discourse samples as well as collaborating on research process and facilitation. The second stage was consultation with Māori Deaf stakeholders. Recordings of Māori Deaf signers were presented for consideration at a consultation meeting to seek approval for their use in the research. Although this material is in the public domain, those appearing in the videos, or their family (in the case of an individual who had passed away), gave their blessing for these recordings to be used. As Māori Data Sovereignty principles outline, Māori people "have an inherent right to exercise control over Māori data" (Te Mana Raraunga, 2018).

The third and fourth research stages entailed preliminary analysis of target features in the recorded discourse samples, followed by online focus group meetings to review and discuss these. The participant group comprised 11 Māori Deaf individuals—four women and seven men—with ages ranging from late twenties to sixties. In the first round of focus groups, we collected data pertaining to their language ideologies concerning NZSL and te reo Māori, as well as comments on features from recording excerpts. The second round of focus groups reviewed summaries of participants' contributions from the first focus group meetings with opportunities to give feedback and ask further questions if required. These two rounds of focus groups meant that participants were involved in both generating and warranting the preliminary analysis. To understand the social import of language variation, Eckert (2018) highlights the importance of seeking speakers' explanations of language practices—that is, what they believe they are doing with language–in this case, in relation to being Māori Deaf people.

Recordings approved by participants for analysis included samples of NZSL discourse in contexts that can be identified as Māori centred in terms of place or subject matter. Signers were Māori Deaf NZSL users who regularly attend Māori Deaf hui and Māori Deaf events, and discuss Māori Deaf affairs. These individuals constitute an emerging community of practice (CoP) (R. McKee et al., 2007; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015), and one important way in which CoPs are constituted is through shared linguistic practices.

Eight approved language samples were analysed. These samples consisted of six individual signers, two of whom appear twice. Table 1 introduces the recording contexts, the role of each participant and the discourse type.

As illustrated in Table 1, contexts ranged from a formal ceremonial setting with a large in-person audience to filmed posts for social media. The various discourse genres identified in the language samples include traditional avenues of capturing

TABLE 1 Details of speaker roles and discourse type in language samples

Speaker	Role	Discourse type	Sample length mm:ss
Speaker A	Speaker for the host or welcoming party	Whaikōrero at a pōwhiri	06:12
Speaker B	Speaker for the visiting party	Whaikōrero at a pōwhiri	07:02
Speaker C	Panellist	Public panel discussion with a live audience	11:00
Speaker C	Presenter	Educational video about pōwhiri protocol on a marae, filmed for an online audience	06:35
Speaker D	Staff member	Information-sharing video filmed for an online audience	03:18
Speaker D	Himself	Pepeha delivery filmed for an online audience	01:24
Speaker E	Storyteller	Pūrākau filmed for an online audience	01:06
Speaker F	Spokesperson for a Māori Deaf organisation	Information-sharing video filmed for an online (social media) audience	00:34

and transmitting mātauranga Māori, such as whaikōrero, pūrākau and pepeha. These genres, traditionally performed in te reo Māori, further indicate a desire to engage with mātauranga Māori and construct Deaf mātauranga Māori. The wide variety of samples allows for target feature analysis across discourse settings and registers.

The first feature we report on is *neologisms*, meaning recent coinages or innovative use of existing NZSL signs to express Māori concepts. Such signs are sometimes referred to in the Deaf community as "Māori signs". The second and related feature we report on is *mouthing* of a Māori word (or phrase) with a sign or signs.

Neologisms

Strategies for expressing Māori concepts via new signs or usages are described in this section. A total of 71 signs with Māori reference were identified, taking the form of compound signs, short phrases, coinages or the repurposing of an existing NZSL sign. Eleven of these signs are already documented in the NZSL Dictionary, and thus not considered neologisms, and the last four were added to the dictionary after the completion of this study: MĀORI, MARAE, KAUMĀTUA, TE-REO-MĀORI, PĀKEHĀ, AROHA, WHAKAWHANAUNGATANGA, PEPEHA, KARAKIA, MANA and TĒNĀ KOUTOU.

In sign languages generally, semantic extension of an existing sign, that is, expanding or modifying its meaning, is a common strategy for generating new lexical meanings required for new, or newly accessed, topics or contexts. For example, during Covid-19, the usual sense of the sign SPREAD was extended to convey "epidemic" (Vale & McKee, 2022). Semantic extension was the most frequent strategy found in this data (40 instances), and extension of an existing sign by the addition of Māori word mouthing was the most common means (26 instances).

Various loan translations were found and are listed in Table 2. Loan translations are renditions of phrases or components of words and can be part-for-part, such as "lock + down", or word-for-word, such as "close contact". One such example in this data is repetition of the sign GO to render the triplet structured phrase "haere, haere, haere atu rā" commonly used to farewell the deceased (Hura, 2016).

Another loan translation that corresponds with the structure of a Māori phrase is seen with the *compound* neologism TE-REO-MĀORI + MĀORI (see Figure 5). The complete meaning is encompassed by the first sign alone, and this neologism has no other more general meaning in NZSL. Although the addition of MĀORI to form a compound is somewhat redundant, it seems to mirror the phrase structure and length of the spoken phrase "te reo Māori". All but one of the loan translations found in the data were proper nouns, mostly comprising more than one word in Māori, such as the names of places, atua, iwi and community groups.

TABLE 2 NZSL loan translations identified in language samples

Concept	English translation	NZSL gloss
haere, haere, haere atu rā	farewell to the deceased	GO GO GO
Ngāti Turi	group name, Deaf or Māori Deaf collective	IWI + DEAF
Ngāti Turi o Aotearoa	group name, Deaf or Māori Deaf collective	IWI + DEAF + AOTEAROA
Papatūānuku (two variants)	Mother Earth	M + EARTH, EARTH
Tāne-Mahuta (three variants)	god of the forest	GOD + FOREST, MAN, T.A.N.E + FOREST
te reo Māori	the Māori language	TE-REO-MĀORI + MĀORI
Tu Tangata Turi	Māori Deaf group name	STAND + PEOPLE + DEAF
whānau Turi	group name, 'Deaf family'	FAMILY + DEAF

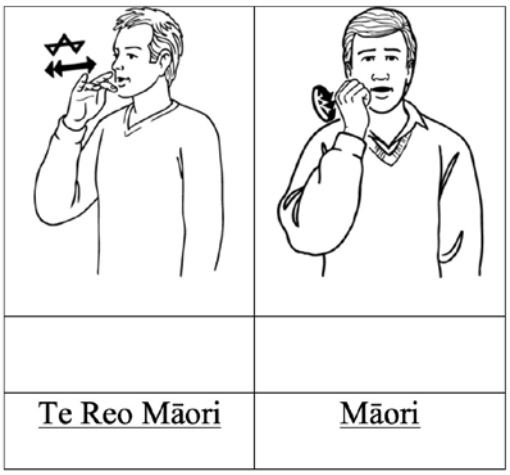

FIGURE 5 Neologism meaning te reo Māori

Greetings, closings and acknowledgements provide opportunity for constructing and framing a linguistic space where Māori Deaf individuals can identify themselves, the audience and the event as Māori. Formulaic greetings, closings and acknowledgements motivated the most use of neologisms. These comprised three main ways of signing "kia ora", "tēnā koe/kōrua/koutou" and "tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa". For these three concepts, analysis showed 12 variations in the articulation of handshape, palm orientation, movement or location. Most (8) of these greetings, closings and acknowledgements used a version of the sign neologism TĒNĀ-KOE (see Figure 6).



FIGURE 6 Neologism: TĒNĀ-KOE

The movement of TĒNĀ-KOE was modified to indicate plural addressees ("acknowledgement to you all"), and to construct a register of formal public address by expanding the size and duration of signs. No documentation or anecdotal evidence suggests that this sign is used outside of public address contexts (such as a greeting between two individuals). Plural addressees were denoted by repetition of the greeting directed towards individuals; compounding two signs, for example, HELLO+TĒNĀ-KOE; or adding a semicircular movement (see Figure 7), which is consistent with the movement path of plural pointing pronouns. Although this variant was recently added to the NZSL Dictionary as TĒNĀ KOUTOU, the circular movement in Figure 7 may indicate the speaker's self-inclusion as a part of the group being addressed (tēnā tātou).



FIGURE 7 Plural inflection of TĒNĀ-KOE



FIGURE 8 Neologism: KIA ORA

The few greetings or farewells that did not incorporate a form of the neologism TĒNĀ-KOE were variations of either HELLO (see Figure 8), extending the meaning of this sign to a less formal

greeting such as "kia ora", or open-hand pointing, extending its meaning (when repeatedly signed from left to right or vice versa) to an acknowledgement equivalent to "tēnā koutou/tātou" (see Figure 9).



FIGURE 9 Neologism: TĒNĀ KOUTOU/TĀTOU

Without going into detail here about word formation mechanisms in NZSL, we found that strategies for creating neologisms in a Māori context echo those described in previous research on lexical innovation (R. McKee et al., 2007; Vale & McKee, 2022). Strategies included blending a sign with Māori mouthing to modify its meaning, forming a loan translation of a Māori word or phrase using NZSL signs with similar meaning, and creatively combining internal (morphological) resources of NZSL to form a new sign. Some neologisms fill lexical gaps arising from translational inequivalence for expressing Māori concepts, while others repurpose existing NZSL signs, adding Māori meaning to their semantics.

Extensive discussions with participants about signs with Māori reference suggest a high level of consciousness about lexical innovation; they offered various examples of innovative signs or usage, their meaning and how they were created. Signs with visually transparent origins were preferred to express referents in the physical world; one participant commented, "I only get what is visually accessible to me, only what I can see, because I don't hear anything". In some cases, they credited Māori Deaf individuals as originators of specific signs or phrases. "Haere, haere, haere atu rā", signed "GO GO GO", is one example that participants attributed to a particular Māori Deaf leader, saying "his signs are a treasure". Examples such as this show the value placed on neologisms that are seen to carry Māori Deaf cultural capital.

Mouthing

The second feature we analysed is mouthing with signs. Especially relevant to this enquiry is that Deaf signers in multilingual contexts may use mouthing from more than one spoken language as a bimodal form of code-switching, which in turn can indicate identity affiliation (Palfreyman, 2020; Quinto-Pozos & Adam, 2013).

In this data, we found instances of Māori loanwords that have become common in NZE, such as "tamariki" paralleled in NZSL by mouthing "tamariki" with the sign CHILDREN. In this instance, the meaning of this sign is not altered by the selection of Māori mouthing and therefore seems socially motivated, as it can be in spoken discourse (King, 1995), showing that the signer aligns with Māori identity or wants to evoke a Māori context. Other examples show speakers choosing Māori mouthing to semantically extend an existing NZSL sign to express Māori reference. Examples include mouthing of "karakia" with PRAY, "whānau" with FAMILY, and "pōwhiri" with WELCOME.

Māori mouthing was also found with loan translations that were mediated through common English translations, for example, "Papatūānuku" mouthed with the signed phrase MOTHER EARTH and "Tāne-Mahuta" mouthed with the signed phrase GOD FOREST. This showed that while the NZSL phrase was formed via loan translation of an English phrase, these signers were now intentionally selecting Māori mouthing as an identity-defining (Māori Deaf) variant.

Comparison of recordings made some years apart hint at change and individual variation in practices. In the oldest recorded sample from 2016, Speaker C expresses the concepts of *wairua* and *karanga*, using the signs SPIRIT and SING with mouthing "spirit" and "sing". Three years later, in 2019, the same speaker mouths "wairua" with SPIRIT, suggesting change in his Māori vocabulary knowledge and his awareness of the cultural positioning attributed to this knowledge. Although we found instances of signs with Māori reference accompanied by English mouthing, most signs with Māori reference either had no mouthing or Māori mouthing present. Proper nouns (Māori groups and iwi names) and signs found in the NZSL Dictionary such as MĀORI, TE-REO-MĀORI and MARAE occurred almost exclusively with Māori mouthing. Learning Māori vocabulary

contributes to Deaf semiotic repertoires; its use in these blended forms echoes Palfreyman's (2020) finding that selecting mouthing from a language other than what typically accompanies a sign is a form of linguistic variation that can intentionally mark social distinctions.

When focus groups reviewed the samples of recorded language, mouthing was a feature that participants raised, indicating that they are aware that this linguistic practice has social import. Although it was not clearly evident in the recordings, some participants expressed a view that a Māori Deaf signing style entails the minimisation or absence of mouthing, rather than mouthing Māori words. For example, some participants commented that Speaker A's mouthing that was evident in his pōwhiri sample differed from his (anecdotally observed) signing when in an exclusively Māori Deaf group, in which they felt he would use minimal mouthing. Public speaking (signing) style was also discussed; one participant said that they believe mouthing is reduced in NZSL whaikōrero. This perception or practice may reflect an intention to dissociate NZSL from English (mouthing), the language of an out-group (Hickey, 2000) in this context, to parallel the fact that hearing Māori speakers would typically be speaking in Māori rather than English.

As evidenced in the sections on neologisms and mouthing, Māori Deaf people are forging their own language practices to participate in Māori-speaking contexts and to express Māori Deaf identity in NZSL. These practices are understood by Māori Deaf people as cultural capital; for example, some neologisms coined by leading individuals are regarded as symbols of identity and as taonga to be passed on to others.

Previous studies have explored Māori Deaf identity (Smiler, 2004, 2006; Smiler & McKee, 2007) and Māori-related neologisms in NZSL (R. McKee et al., 2007). However, this is the first time language practices (i.e., neologisms and mouthing) have been analysed and considered alongside evidence of Māori Deaf CoP ideologies about identity expression through language use. Evidence-based research such as this is important to clarify questions and sometimes misassumptions (originating mainly outside the Deaf community) about how sign language practices interact with ethnic identity.

Conclusion

As Māori Deaf people have gained more access to Māori-centred settings, and revitalisation of te reo Māori has expanded its use in wider society, there has been more opportunity and impetus for Māori Deaf NZSL users to develop ways of expressing Māori concepts and forms of discourse. The emerging language practices in this CoP support their dynamic construction of Māori-turi-tanga by enabling them to perform traditional speech acts such as karanga, karakia and whaikōrero, and to develop their own mātauranga Māori. Lexical demands in these new roles and activities prompt signers to coin novel signs, or to use translation and code-blending strategies to leverage the meaning of existing vocabulary and semantic resources in NZSL.

Reflecting the fact that greetings, closings and acknowledgements in Māori are key to framing individual identities and contexts as Māori, signs that express these functions were the most prevalent in the NZSL data. The use of these neologisms is variable and appears to be tied to specific situations encountered by this particular CoP. Māori word mouthing was also observed in this data; however, participants stated a perception that reduced mouthing overall signals a Māori Deaf signing style.

Lexical borrowing or code-switching into spoken Māori to signal identity or cultural affiliation (King, 1995) is not directly accessible to Deaf signers because of modality difference between the languages. Our findings show that this Māori Deaf CoP are innovating other practices for similar purposes, including loan translations, neologisms and combining Māori mouthing with culturally salient signs, in some cases to mirror contemporary Māori borrowings in NZE. These findings echo previous descriptions of bimodal and translingual practices (Jaraisy & Stamp, 2024; Kusters et al., 2017) of Deaf communities in other situations of language contact and intersectional identity.

In summary, the revitalisation of te reo Māori and the valorisation of NZSL intersect in the language ecology of Māori Deaf NZSL users, and this is pushing innovation in language practices and ideologies among Māori Deaf people. Critical reflection and documentation of these changes within this CoP supports the continuing development of Māori-turi-tanga.

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Author notes

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Capitalised use of "Deaf" is a convention preferred by many Deaf people and authors to denote cultural and linguistic affiliation with a community of sign language users. References to "deaf education" and "deaf children" use lower case "d" as an audiological descriptor, since cultural affiliation cannot be assumed in those contexts.

In sign language research, it is conventional to gloss individual signs in CAPS to distinguish these from spoken words. Hyphenated glosses indicate a two-word translation for one sign.

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Ethical considerations

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Glossary

Aotearoa	New Zealand
aroha	love
atua	deity, deities
haere, haere, haere atu rā	farewell, farewell, farewell (to the deceased)
hīkoi	march
hui	gathering/s
iwi	tribe
karakia	incantation, prayer, chant (in te reo Māori)
karanga	ceremonial call
kaumātua	elder/s
kaupapa	topic
Kaupapa Māori	Māori values-based
kia ora	hello, be well
Kirikiriroa	Hamilton
mana	prestige, authority, status
mana motuhake	self-determination, independence, autonomy
Maniapoto	iwi group from the King Country area
Māori-turi-tanga	Māori Deafness, Māori Deaf way of life
Māoritanga	Māoriness, Māori way of life
marae	traditional tribe-affiliated meeting grounds
mātauranga	knowledge
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
Ngāti Maniapoto	iwi group from the King Country area
Ngāti Turi	group name, Māori Deaf collective
Ngāti Turi o Aotearoa	group name, Māori Deaf collective
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
Papatūānuku	Mother Earth
pepeha	formal self-introduction in te reo Māori
pōwhiri	formal welcoming ceremony
pūrākau	Māori narrative
Rūaumoko Marae	a national pan-tribal Deaf marae within a school
tamariki	children
Tāne-Mahuta	god of the forest
taonga	treasure/s
tauiwi	non-Māori person
te ao Māori	the Māori world
te reo Māori	the Māori language
tēnā koe	hello (to one person)
tēnā kōrua	hello (to two people)
tēnā koutou	hello (to three or more people)

tēnā koutou katoa	hello to all (excluding the speaker)
tēnā tātou	hello to all (including the speaker)
tikanga	correct practice, protocol, process
tino rangatiratanga	absolute sovereignty, self-determination
tino rangatira-turi-tanga	absolute sovereignty, self-determination for Māori Deaf people
Tu Tangata Turi	Māori Deaf group name
Turi	Deaf
wairua	spirit, soul
whaikōrero	formal speech-making
whakapapa	genealogy
whakataukī	proverb
whakawhanaungatanga	building relationships
whānau	extended familial group
Whānau Turi	Māori Deaf collective
wharenui	meeting house traditionally on marae

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