

Indigenous-Language Publishing in Aotearoa: A Case Study on Huia Publishers and Kotahi Rau Pukapuka

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Abstract—The Māori, Indigenous people of Aotearoa¹, have endured significant cultural and linguistic loss due to prolonged colonization. In response, the Māori launched a movement in the 1970s to reclaim their rights and revitalize their language, leading to the Māori Language Act of 1987 and a growing demand for Māori-language books, primarily for education. Despite some growth, Māori literary production remains limited. Publishing Indigenous-language literature faces numerous challenges, particularly with funding. Publishers often prioritize commercially viable projects over Indigenous language works due to market size and distribution limitations. These economic hurdles restrict access to Māori-language literature, threatening the language's survival. Despite these challenges, initiatives such as Huia Publishers and Kotahi Rau Pukapuka persist in producing Māori-language works. This paper examines their contributions, highlighting the Māori community's efforts to overcome obstacles in preserving and transmitting their language, offering broader insights into Indigenous-language publishing challenges and strategies.

Keywords—Māori language, Indigenous² Publishing, language preservation, Indigenous language literature

I. INTRODUCTION

This section provides a brief introduction to the historical background of Aotearoa and the rise of Māori-language books. It then details the methodology used in this study.

A. The Challenge of Māori-Language Literature

After the Māori people signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi³, the British Crown proclaimed colonizing Aotearoa in 1840. Political interference and colonial policies led to the prohibition of using the Māori language, with the British colonial government mandating the use of English in schools through the 1847 Education Ordinance and the 1867 Education Act. Similarly, the Native Schools Amendment Act of 1871 established schools in which only English was taught. Consequently, the policies effectively restricted the Māori language in educational settings, and the Māori language was systematically marginalized for many years [1].

Political suppression led to a disconnection between Māori people and their language, fundamentally altering their cultural identity. Despite this, many Māori individuals used the dominant language to voice their grievances, challenge injustices, and express their ideas through literary works.

This era, known as the Māori Renaissance, marked a significant series of Indigenous social and literary movements. The rise of contemporary Māori literature is closely linked to the Māori Renaissance, during which Indigenous people often fought for their rights and reinforced their ethnic identities through writing [2]. However, these works were primarily produced in English, the colonizers' language, to engage with mainstream culture. As a result, literature in Indigenous languages has been largely overlooked, sparking concerns among scholars and Indigenous writers regarding the scarcity of literature in ethnic languages. Later, the Aotearoa government established the Waitangi Tribunal and passed the Māori Language Act of 1987, which aimed to revive the Māori language. This led to a resurgence in Māori language publishing, with a focus on educational materials for Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa⁴ [3].

The movement and policies have led to increased attention and renewed focus on Indigenous language literature. However, financial constraints significantly influenced the direction of Indigenous publishing. Duncan claims that ethnic marketing to Indigenous groups in the postcolonial context is pointless because of their rapid assimilation into the dominant settler culture [3]. She notes that Indigenous publishing largely relies on government funding or private sponsorship, given its niche market. Therefore, readership is crucial to the viability of Indigenous literature. Ngulube pointed out that the market depends on having sufficient readers willing to purchase books, which encourages publishers to print them.

Nevertheless, most Indigenous markets are too small to be profitable because of a lack of reading culture and poor purchasing habits among Indigenous peoples [4]. Thus, publishers prefer to invest in books with a broader distribution potential. Additionally, the high costs associated with producing Indigenous language publications further discourage publishers [5].

Ngulube [4] underscored the vital role of publishers in empowering authors, asserting that without a publisher, there is no book. Bernard [5] added that minority languages are at greater risk of extinction because of their lack of strong literary traditions compared to languages with established ones. To address this issue, Bernard [5] advocates the development of an Indigenous publishing industry that extends beyond educational materials. He argues that building a robust literary tradition in Indigenous languages is essential for competing with dominant languages and effectively representing Indigenous knowledge and cultural values.

⁴ These are Māori-immersion pre and primary schools, respectively.

¹ Aotearoa is the Māori name for New Zealand.

² The term 'Indigenous' gained prominence in the 1970s, shaped by activists and later adopted by the UN to refer to peoples with deep ties to lands affected by colonization and displacement. Capitalization reflects respect for these communities and their histories.

³ Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the 1840 agreement between Māori and the British Crown, differs from its English counterpart, with the Māori version preserving self-governance rights. These discrepancies have fueled ongoing debate over the treaty's interpretation and implications.

Ngulube [4] stressed that publishing should prioritize cultural, intellectual, and social values rather than being solely driven by commercial interests. Bernard [5] also suggested that Indigenous publishing initiatives should diversify their activities beyond traditional book publishing to sustain their operations and create economic opportunities for Indigenous language speakers. Accordingly, this article will examine Māori publishing in Aotearoa through the lens of Huia Publishers and the Kotahi Rau Pukapuka project, focusing on how these two entities continue to produce Māori-language works despite financial challenges and their vital role in preserving and promoting the Māori language within mainstream society. Additionally, this paper offers insights that are applicable to Indigenous language publishing efforts worldwide.

II. MATERIAL AND METHOD

A. Material

1) Huia Publisher

Founded in 1991, Huia was established to amplify Māori voices and perspectives in literature. It plays a crucial role in Māori publishing, supporting authors through Pikihiua Awards and Te Papa Tupu Writers, and providing resources for students, Māori language learners, and those interested in Māori culture.

2) Kotahi Rau Pukapuka

Initiated in 2019, this ambitious project aims to publish 100 books in Māori. It reflects a growing commitment to revitalizing the Māori language through literature.

B. Method

1) Interviews

The study included in-depth interviews with Brian Morris, Executive Director of Huia Publishers, and Pania Papa, CEO of Kotahi Rau Pukapuka. Their insights offer a comprehensive understanding of the production processes, challenges, and strategies involved in sustaining Indigenous-language publishing in Aotearoa.

2) Literary review

The study reviewed literature on the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages, with a focus on Māori. Key works by Biggs [1] and Ngulube [4] discuss the impact of colonization on linguistic transmission and financial issues, while Garlick [2] and Bernard [5] address the challenges of sustaining Māori language publishing and the importance of fostering strong literary traditions. Ongoing work in Aotearoa reflects the growing momentum in Indigenous language publishing.

These combined approaches provide a holistic view of the strategies driving the resurgence of Māori-language literature and its significance in cultural preservation.

III. MĀORI-LANGUAGE PUBLISHING: HUIA PUBLISHERS & KOTAHĪ RAU PUKAPUKA

Table 1 provides a comprehensive summary of the two key publishing initiatives, highlighting their approaches to maintaining and promoting Indigenous language publications within mainstream society. It examines the strategies they

employ, such as funding models, audience engagement, distribution methods, and collaborative efforts, to ensure the sustainability and visibility of Indigenous-language literature.

Table 1. The summary of Huia Publishers and Kotahi Rau Pukapuka

Name	Huia Publishers	Kotahi Rau Pukapuka
Year	1991	2019
Founder	Robyn & Brian Bargh	Trustee Member of KRP
Aim	To advocate Māori voices & perspectives	To publish 100 books
Publishing	1. Focus: Māori Kaupapa 2. Division: Commercial & Education	Translates literature & creates stories in Māori
Funding Issue	Creative New Zealand & Māori language funding.	1. Government funds for Māori purposes & arts 2. Philanthropic donors 3. Membership
Marketing	1. Acclaimed Writers 2. Literary Awards 3. Book Events	Chooses globally renowned books to translate.
Intended Audience	Students & Māori language learners.	Māori language learners & families promoting Māori.
Challenge	1. Standardizing the language 2. Māori intellectual property	1. Funding 2. Western publishing framework 3. Translation 4. Few proficient editors
Vision & Goal	1. Support Māori writers & develop Māori voices. 2. Develop online platforms. 3. Publish 40% Māori language books annually.	To contribute high quality Māori literature.

A. The Trailblazer in Indigenous Publishing: Huia Publishers

Since its founding in 1991, Huia Publishers has been a trailblazer in Māori language publishing. Inspired by founders Robyn and Brian Bargh's experiences in Papua New Guinea during the 1980s, Huia was created to address similar issues of "tino rangatiratanga" (self-determination) within the Māori community. Huia has since become a platform dedicated to elevating Māori narratives and perspectives [6].

1) Publishing focus

Huia Publishers focuses on Māori writers, stories, language, and Kaupapa (Māori values), with two main divisions: Commercial Publishing and Education Publishing. The Commercial Publishing division releases 15 to 20 books annually across genres like novels, poetry, histories, and academic works, while the Education Publishing division distributes Māori language materials for the Ministry of Education, targeting students and teachers. Approximately 40% of Huia's output is in Māori, with all children's books translated from English to Māori and some published as bilingual editions. Manuscripts are reviewed by a committee that considers factors such as financial viability, literary merit, and cultural relevance before publication [7].

2) Editor, writer, and translator

Huia Publishers prioritize training their staff internally because existing publishing courses do not meet their specific needs. Huia builds strong relationships with writers through the Pikihiua Awards and Te Papa Tupu Writers Program. The Pikihiua Awards serve as a platform for emerging Māori

writers to gain recognition and publication opportunities. Huia identifies new talent through this competition and publishes their work in *Huia Short Stories* [8]. The Te Papa Tupu Writers Programme provides selected writers with a six-month writing incubator, offering mentorship and financial support to develop their skills [9].

Brian Morris, one of Huia's licensed translators, emphasized the importance of preserving language nuances and cultural values during the translation process. Despite not growing up speaking Māori, Morris learned the language while teaching and now draws on existing works and consultations with other translators when faced with challenges.

3) Marketing and funding issue

Huia Publishers actively monitors trends and interests that drive demand for their books, and Morris notes a growing market for Māori publishing. With over 30 years of experience, Huia has established a strong reputation through collaboration with acclaimed writers and by winning prestigious awards, both of which help attract readers and increase book sales. In addition to marketing their books, Huia engages with Māori readers through events and seeks government funding when needed, although most of this support, such as from Creative New Zealand, typically favors English-language publications. They also pursue grants specifically designed to support Māori writers and the Māori language.

4) Intended audience and bestsellers

Huia's target audience includes students, Māori language learners, and those interested in Māori culture. Popular titles like *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori Values* by Hirini Moko Mead and *Matariki: The Star of the Year* by Rangi Matamua are bestsellers. In Māori-language fiction, *Nga Waituhi O Rehua* by Katerina Mataira is notable for its inclusion of an audio CD, allowing readers to listen while reading.

5) Challenging, vision and goals

One of the key challenges Huia faces is the standardization of the Māori language. The growth of Māori medium education has led to the development of new words, but there is debate over whether to standardize the language or preserve regional dialects. For example, some prefer the word "whānau" with macrons, while others use double vowels, such as "whaanau". Another significant challenge is protecting the intellectual property of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge). Huia is at the forefront of advocating for these rights, particularly concerning the ownership of content widely distributed by the Ministry of Education.

Huia continues to support Māori writers and is expanding into digital platforms. Raukupu, an educational tool for understanding Māori texts, and Autuhi, a platform for creating Māori language stories, demonstrate Huia's commitment to both digital and physical publishing. Huia Publishers aims to build a comprehensive library of Māori literature, ensuring the preservation and growth of Māori culture and language for future generations [10].

B. The Establishment of Kotahi Rau Pukapuka

Kotahi Rau Pukapuka is a promising project in the Māori literary field, launched in 2019 with the goal of publishing 100 books in Māori. Chief Executive Pānia Papa emphasizes

that the project focuses on translating literature and creating original stories in Māori. The initiative was conceived by trustee chairperson Mike Dreaver and his wife Miriama Kamo, who noticed a lack of reading material for adult learners and collaborated with Witi Ihimaera, Sam Elworthy of Auckland University Press, and other significant figures to launch the project [11].

1) Translating and publishing

Kotahi Rau Pukapuka's strategy includes translating globally recognized titles into Māori while encouraging more Māori language authors to publish original works. However, most of the current work involves translation due to the small number of writers who choose to write in Māori. This project aims to publish five Māori-language books annually, which could take up to 20 years to achieve. In addition to print books, Kotahi Rau Pukapuka produces audiobooks to teach correct pronunciation, which is beneficial to learners [12].

Securing rights for translations, such as those for the *Harry Potter* series, has been challenging. Obtaining rights for *Harry Potter* audiobooks involved overcoming the long waiting lists for other languages. Eventually, they secured rights to the CD version. When selecting titles, Pānia consults with trustees, literature experts, and authors such as Paula Morris and Witi Ihimaera.

The project often selects globally recognized books for translation purposes. Papa, who has experience translating popular cartoons such as *Dora the Explorer* and *SpongeBob SquarePants* into Māori, notes the benefits of translating familiar stories. These well-known narratives help readers and viewers better understand the content in Māori.

Translator Leon Blake translated the *Harry Potter* series for Kotahi Rau Pukapuka, adapting the names and terminology to fit the Māori's sound and context. He also consulted with *Harry Potter* fans to translate specific terminology, such as the spell "Wingardium Leviosa". He combined "Levi", related to levitation, with the Māori word "rewa", meaning "to lift", to create a suitable translation. Blake acknowledged the pressure to ensure accurate translation and emphasized the significance of providing Māori children with books that encourage creative expression, distinct from the real world [13].

Regarding translators, Pānia leverages her network as a former Māori language teacher, which includes highly fluent speakers across iwi.

2) Funding issue

The project is a charitable trust focused on high-quality Māori language publications. The project's funding relies on three main sources: government support through grants from Creative New Zealand and Te Mātāwai, philanthropic donations from organizations such as ANZ Bank, and a membership program launched in July 2021 that offers newsletters and discounts for a monthly fee.

3) Intended audience

The project received positive feedback from Facebook, conversations, and booksellers, who were surprised by the volume of Kotahi Rau Pukapuka's books. Pānia Papa highlights that growing the readership of Māori language books is a key focus, especially because such books are often relegated to small corners in stores. While exact sales figures are not disclosed, the Māori translation of *Harry Potter* sold

around 5,000 copies in 2021, with other titles selling a few thousand each. The primary readers include Māori language learners, speakers, and families, as well as schools and preschools. Additionally, non-Māori readers who support Indigenous literature contribute to the readership.

4) Challenge & vision

Kotahi Rau Pukapuka faces significant challenges, particularly in securing adequate funding and compensating translators and editors. Integrating Māori language and cultural values into a Western publishing framework presents additional challenges, especially given the impact of colonization on the language. Papa notes that English has influenced Māori, leading to changes in language quality and the need to adapt translations to fit Māori cultural paradigms. Moreover, finding highly skilled editors in Māori is also difficult, causing delays.

The project's vision, "Kia puāwai te aroha ki te reo mā te rau pukapuka" ("For the love of the language to blossom through 100 books"), reflects its goal to enrich Māori literature and restore the rhythm, pronunciation, and life force of Māori. Through this work, Kotahi Rau Pukapuka hopes to ensure that the Māori language is passed down orally through generations, especially through audiobooks.

IV. ANALYSIS: THE MĀORI'S RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF INDIGENOUS PUBLISHING

Indigenous publishing faces significant challenges, including low sales volumes owing to small populations with limited purchasing power. For Māori language books, the primary market consists of native speakers, who are few compared to English speakers. These books often struggle to find international markets, which further limits their commercial success [14]. However, the Māori have initiated various efforts to revitalize the Māori language through literature.

A. The Emergence of Indigenous Language Literature Driven by Language Revitalization

The Māori Renaissance marked a crucial turning point in the revitalization of Māori cultural identity and language. Key initiatives, such as Kōhanga Reo and the Māori Language Act 1987, played pivotal roles in rejuvenating the language and catalyzing the growth of Indigenous literature. The 2000s witnessed a significant increase in Māori literary output, much of it in the form of translations, reflecting the community's commitment to asserting language rights across multiple domains, including education, politics, and literature.

The government's commitment to supporting Māori communities is evident in its ongoing investment in various initiatives. For instance, the 2024 budget includes \$1.5 billion for Māori education, with \$12 million allocated to Kōhanga Reo property maintenance over four years. For cultural preservation, Te Matatini, the national kapa haka⁵ festival, will receive \$48.7 million over three years starting in 2025.

Additionally, Te Arawhiti⁶, the Office for Māori Crown Relations, will allocate \$3.6 million toward the Crown's response to the ongoing Wakatū litigation—a long-standing property dispute concerning the Nelson Tenth, land originally intended for Māori [15].

The government's support of the Māori has also sparked increased interest in Māori literature among non-Māori. Bridget Williams, director and publisher of Bridget Williams Books, notes that "te ao⁷ and te reo titles have always been in demand from the book-buying public and have been well represented in the Aotearoa publishing industry." Kim Pittar, co-owner and manager of Muir's Bookshop, also observed a growing interest in topics such as Matariki⁸, the New Zealand Wars, and language learning materials. The public has gradually immersed itself in Māori literature, while Māori writers have increasingly integrated the Māori language into their works [16].

B. Extending the Readership of Māori Publishing

To achieve financial sustainability while preserving the language, Māori publishers have expanded their readership beyond the Māori community. Huia Publishers and Kotahi Rau Pukapuka have translated various works into Māori, attracting a broader audience. Kotahi Rau Pukapuka has gained readership by translating well-known literature into Māori, leveraging readers' familiarity with the storylines to encourage engagement.

Huia Publishers employs a strategy where approximately 60% of their publications are in English and 40% in Māori. This approach enables them to release English and Māori editions simultaneously, thereby supporting the financial viability of their Māori language books. Collaborations with celebrated authors such as Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera enhance the appeal of Māori literature to non-Māori readers. Bilingual books are also gaining popularity among parents, further broadening their readership. Huia's inclusive strategy, appealing to both Māori and non-Māori, provides valuable insights for Indigenous publishing.

In addition, the government supports Māori publishing. The Ministry of Education purchased 26,000 copies of *Hare Pota me te Whatu Manapou* (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*) and 13,000 copies of *Nōu te Ao, e Hika e!* (*Oh, The Places You'll Go!*) from Kotahi Rau Pukapuka. These books were distributed to Kura Kaupapa Māori, kura-ā-iwi⁹, and others across the country [17].

The success of language revitalization initiatives has also led to a growing number of non-Māori learning Māori. For instance, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, one of New Zealand's largest providers of Māori courses, enrolled 11,800 students in 2020, with 45% being non-Māori—a 12% increase since 2016. Chief Executive Te Ururoa Flavell attributes this trend to the rising importance of events such as Māori Language Week, Matariki, and Mahuru¹⁰ Māori, which have sparked

⁶ Te Arawhiti, the Office for Māori Crown Relations, is focused on transforming the Māori-Crown relationship by fostering a partnership and supporting the Crown in fulfilling its Treaty obligations.

⁷ 'Te Ao' means 'the world' in Māori.

⁸ Matariki marks the Māori New Year and is celebrated during its first rising in late June or early July.

⁹ Kura ā Iwi is a type of Māori-medium school.

¹⁰ It is the fourth month of the Māori calendar and marks the coming warmer seasons leading into summer.

⁵ Kapa haka, a Māori war dance once used in battle and peaceful gatherings, has evolved into a widely practiced public art form that now reflects contemporary and political themes.

broader interest in the language [18].

C. A Strong Sense of Cultural Identity

For publishers, market demand often takes precedence over subsidies from government or private sources. Decisions on whether to publish Indigenous language books are typically influenced by market considerations rather than a commitment to cultural preservation. Non-Indigenous publishers focusing on appealing to a primarily non-Indigenous audience may not share the same dedication to cultural preservation as Indigenous publishers.

This contrast is evident at Huia Publishers, where the Māori owners are deeply committed to preserving Māori, a commitment rooted in their cultural identity. Despite initial challenges, Huia found a way to overcome obstacles by printing 60% of their books in English to support their operations, using the profits to sustain Māori language literature. Their dedication to Māori cultural preservation is further exemplified by the establishment of the Pikihiua Awards and the Te Papa Tupu writing program, both of which nurture Māori writers in creating literature.

Kotahi Rau Pukapuka emphasizes the importance of audio recordings in preserving language. Papa expresses concern that Māori is increasingly becoming a learned language rather than one transmitted naturally through generations. She underscores the cultural value of recording the language, advocating for the conversion of translated books into audiobooks. This approach revitalizes the essence of the spoken word and provides a valuable resource for those learning Māori [19]. By simultaneously listening and reading, learners can enhance their language skills and deepen their understanding.

The preservation and promotion of Indigenous languages, particularly Māori, face unique challenges in the publishing industry, where market demands often overshadow cultural imperatives. The commitment of Huia Publishers and Kotahi Rau Pukapuka reflects a deep cultural identity that drives their dedication to language revitalization. By strategically balancing market considerations with cultural preservation, these entities have made significant strides in producing and promoting Māori-language literature. The integration of audiobooks further demonstrates an innovative approach to preserving the spoken word, ensuring that the essence of Māori remains accessible to both current and future generations.

V. FINDINGS

Huia Publishers and Kotahi Rau Pukapuka offer key insights for Indigenous language communities worldwide, emphasizing that building literacy and elevating the prestige of Māori requires a robust body of literature. Without strong literary traditions, minority languages face a heightened risk of extinction.

Publishing Indigenous books beyond educational materials is essential for reflecting Indigenous knowledge and values. Written literature elevates the status of a language, making publishing crucial in demonstrating the expressiveness and resilience of Indigenous languages [20]. Huia's and Kotahi Rau Pukapuka's efforts underscore the importance of fostering literary traditions to preserve language, cultural values, and knowledge.

VI. CONCLUSION

Huia Publishers and Kotahi Rau Pukapuka play a vital role in preserving Māori-language literature, showcasing how a strong literary tradition is essential for maintaining cultural identity and addressing the impacts of colonial suppression and financial challenges. As Indigenous languages gain broader recognition, there is a growing appreciation for the literature in these languages, supporting the preservation of language, knowledge, and cultural values. These efforts by Huia and Kotahi Rau Pukapuka not only sustain Māori language and culture but also provide a blueprint for other Indigenous communities, proving that literature is key to cultural survival and empowerment.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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