

# Indigenous Language Publishing in the North American Context

ICLDC5 · March 5, 2017

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# Why Publishing?

- ▶ Often a focus on developing literacy in language revitalization programs
  - ▶ As Watahomigie and McCarty (1997) ask, “Literacy for what?”
- ▶ Many linguists give back to the community by creating books
- ▶ Can be an important **prestige factor**, especially in communities where the dominant language has a rich literary tradition
  - ▶ “The very existence of a book on a shelf or an archive of manuscripts can be of crucial **symbolic value**.” (Krauss 1992:8)
- ▶ Preservation of language, and longevity of materials
  - ▶ “Literary tradition has proven, in the history of languages, to be an effective means of survival and enhancement of language.” (Yamamoto 1998:114)

# Why Publishing?

“For those linguists who want to help preserve language diversity, there are, in my view, two best things to do. One is to help native people develop more language-nest programs. The other is to help native people develop publishing houses.” (Bernard 1997)

- ▶ Literacy alone is not sufficient; it is also necessary to develop a literary tradition
- ▶ Can foster pride in the language, and confer economic benefits to writers in the Indigenous language
- ▶ Allows the language to “compete” with the dominant language
- ▶ Adds to the documentation of the language

# Why North America?

- ▶ Diversity of languages and communities within two larger nations
  - ▶ 169 Indigenous languages spoken in the contiguous 48 states and Alaska, 60 Indigenous languages spoken in Canada. Many different approaches, but single state funding bodies/education authorities.
- ▶ Historically, the majority of these languages have been “non-literary”
  - ▶ Development of literacy and literature relatively recent (cf. European minority languages such as Irish, Welsh, Catalan, etc.)
  - ▶ Easier to analyze the development of literary traditions
  - ▶ Less material to collect into database

# Question: What is the state of the art of Indigenous language publishing in North America?

- ▶ What kinds of books are published in Indigenous languages?
  - ▶ What genres and topics?
- ▶ Why are they published?
  - ▶ Education? Entertainment? Academia?
- ▶ For whom are they published?
  - ▶ Students? Children? Adults? Indigenous people or non-Indigenous academics?
- ▶ How are they published?
  - ▶ Self-publication? Commercial publishing house? Tribal publisher? Academic press?
- ▶ How might extant books affect perceptions of language prestige?

# Building a Database of North American Indigenous Language Books

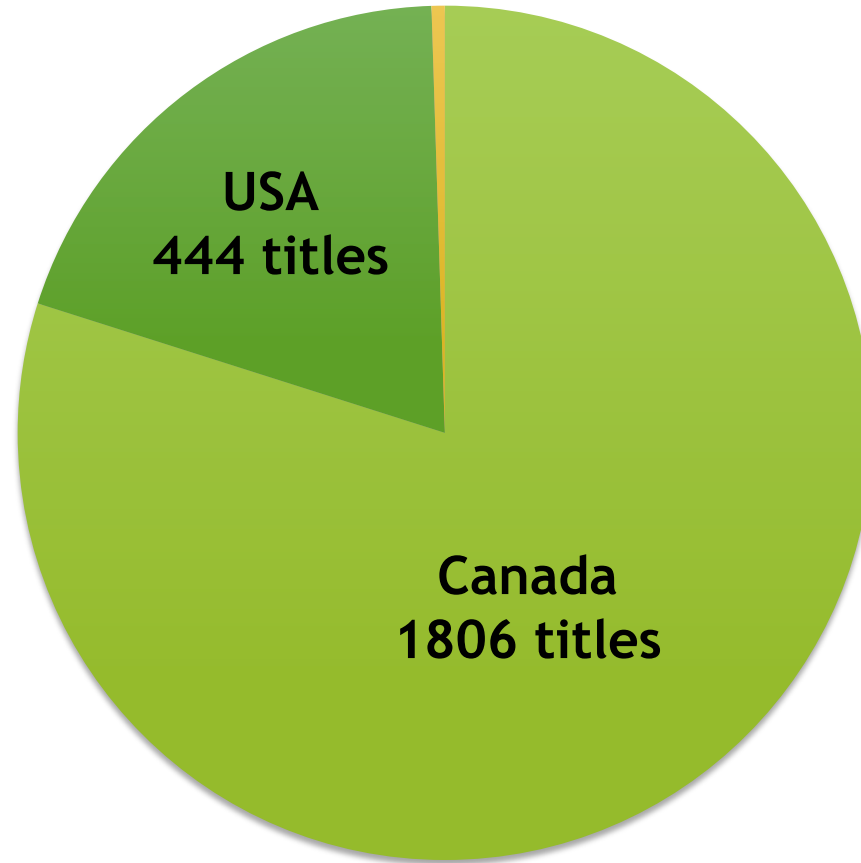
- ▶ Using online resources, I compiled a database of Indigenous books based on the following criteria:
  - ▶ Books written for entertainment or personal edification (no textbooks, dictionaries, grammars, etc.)
  - ▶ Books discoverable via the internet
  - ▶ Books accessible, i.e., relatively easy to acquire
  - ▶ Therefore, many titles that are not easily discoverable or accessible, e.g., titles created for a small number of community members, not advertised on the internet, are not included in the database
- ▶ Resulting database includes **2260 titles** across **102 languages**
  - ▶ Can be accessed online [here](#)

# Building a Database of North American Indigenous Language Books

## ► Information collected:

- Title
- Publisher
- Year of Publication
- Language
- Bilingual vs. Monolingual
- Audience (by age group)
- Genre (picture book, nonfiction, novel, etc.)
- Traditional stories vs. Non-traditional
- Other metadata: binding, price, page count, accessibility

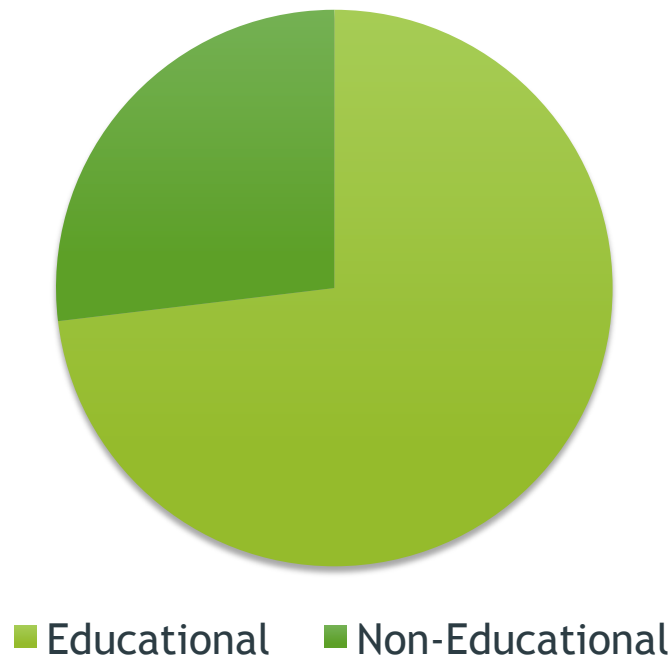
# Indigenous Language Books by Country





# Canada's got a lot of Indigenous language books, eh?

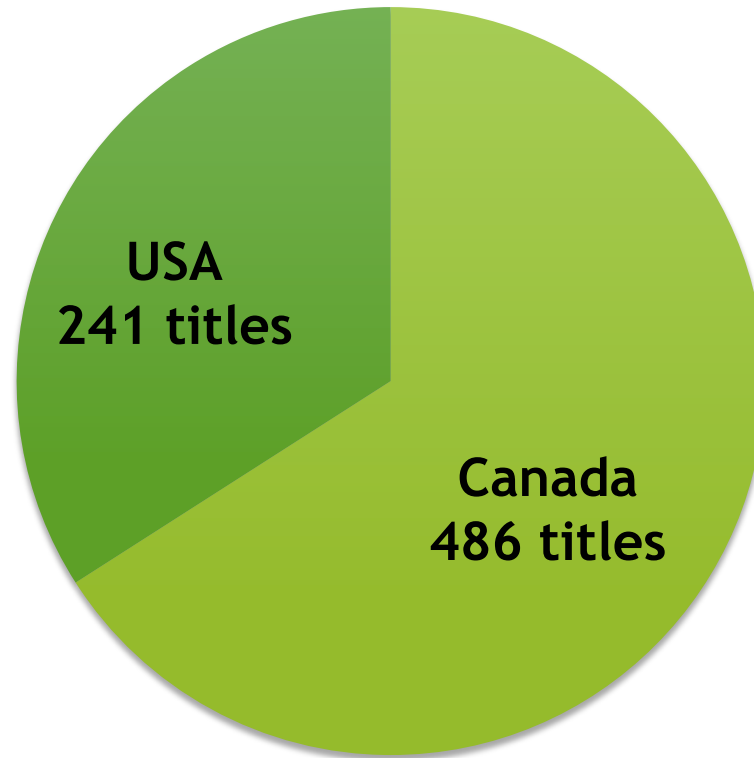
Type of Book



- Dominated by educational titles
  - 1320 titles (73.1%)
- Early readers/primers published by school boards, for example:
  - Cree School Board ([EastCree.org](http://EastCree.org))
  - Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre
  - South Slave Divisional Education Council
  - Kwayaciiwin Education Resource Centre
- Published primarily for use in schools



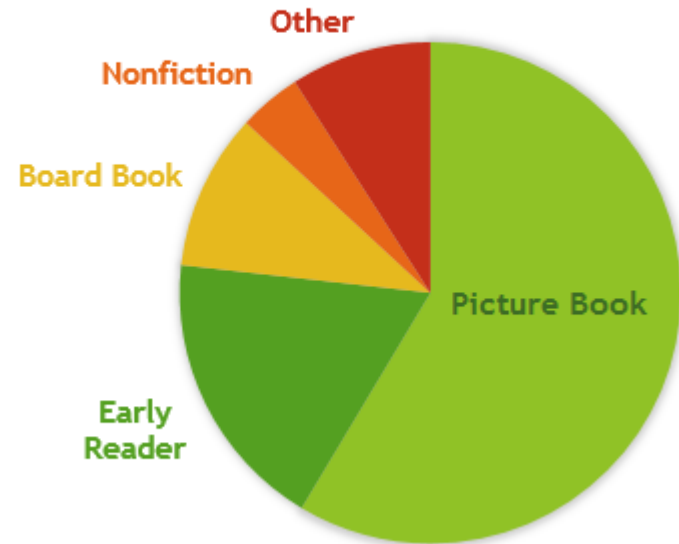
# Non-Educational Books by Country



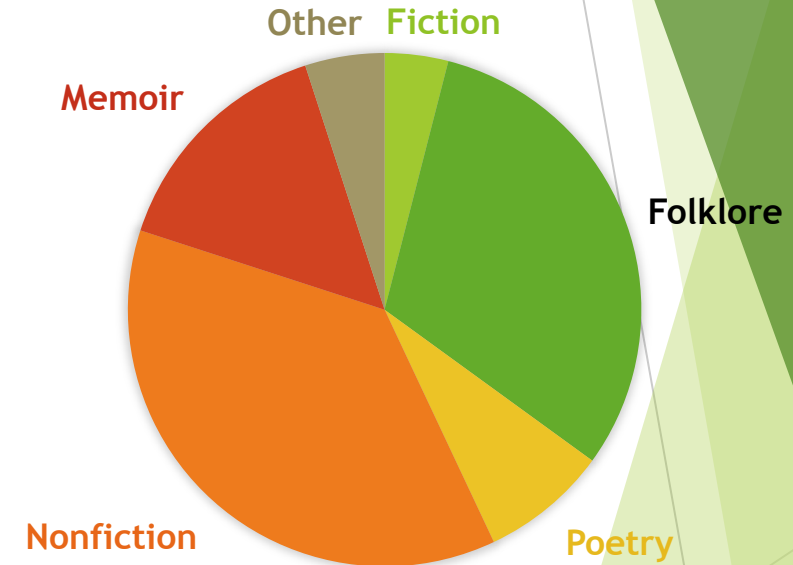
■ USA ■ Canada

# Non-Educational Books: Audience & Genre

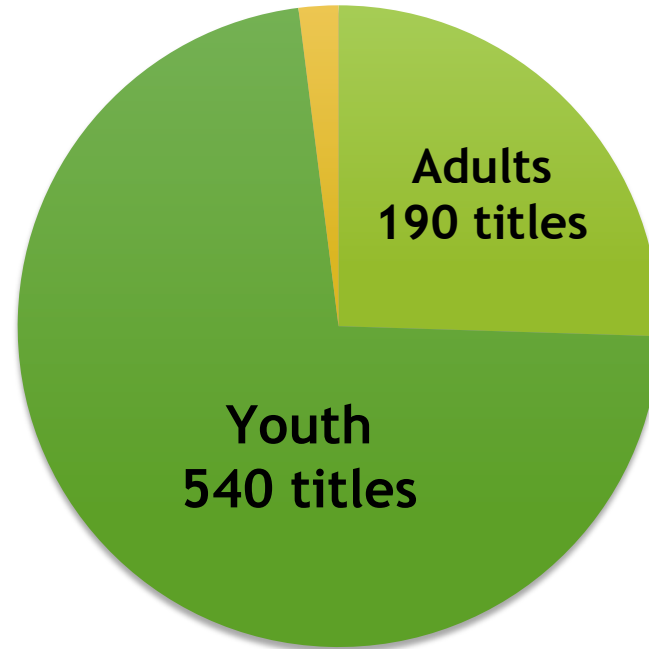
YOUTH TITLES



ADULT TITLES

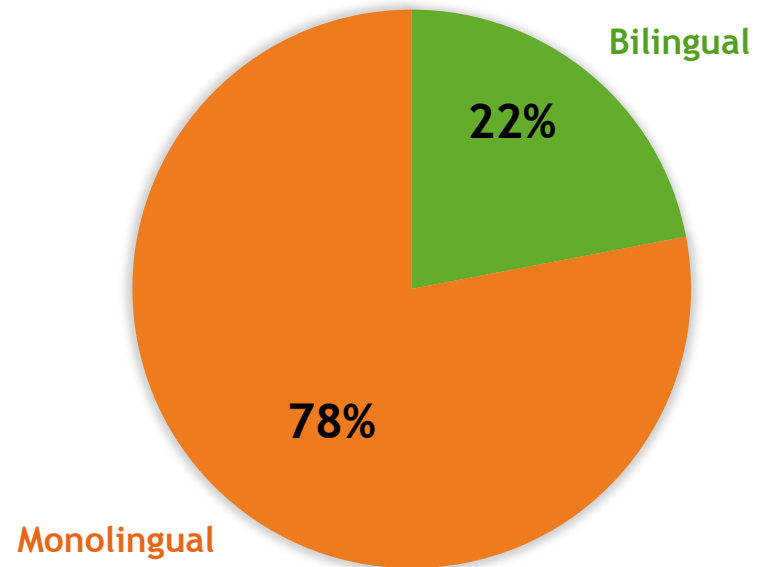


■ Adults ■ Youth ■ All Ages

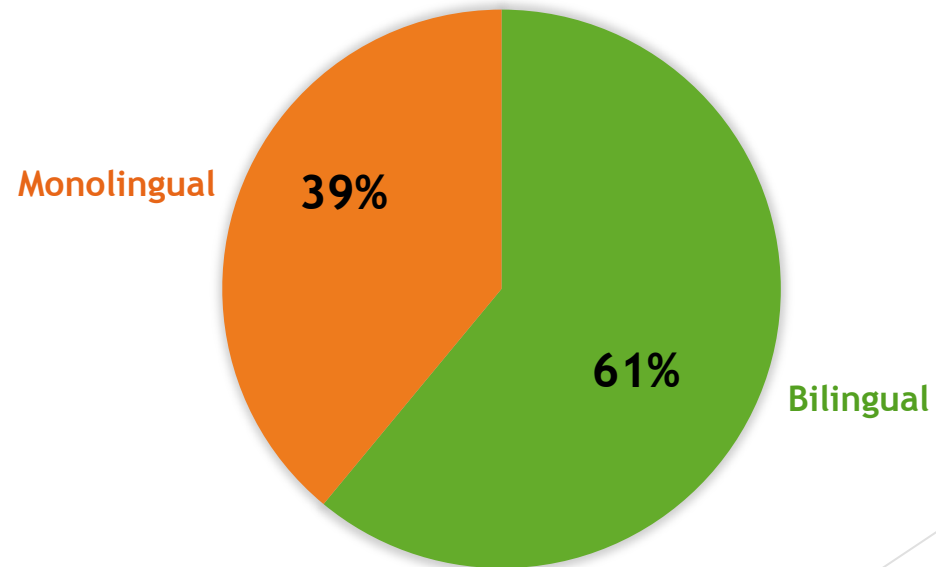


# Educational vs. Non-Educational Books

FORMAT: EDUCATIONAL BOOKS



FORMAT: NON-EDUCATIONAL BOOKS



# Indigenous Language Books by Language

Languages	Titles	Percentage
Cree (13 lgs./dialects)	756	33.5%
N. Athabaskan (19 lgs.)	442	19.6%
Ojibwe (4 dialects)	291	12.9%
Eskimo-Aleut (16 lgs./dialects)	276	12.2%
Navajo	126	5.6%
Mohawk	88	3.9%
Lakota and Dakota	83	3.7%
Michif	38	1.7%
Mi'kmaq	21	0.9%
Cherokee	18	0.8%
Tlingit	17	0.8%
Cayuga	15	0.7%
Oneida	11	0.5%
Other (48 lgs.*)	78	3.5%

\*Includes lgs. with fewer than 10 titles in the database. 26 of the 'Other' lgs. are represented by only one title

# What does the database tell us about the state of the art of Indigenous language publishing?

- ▶ Majority of titles published are produced in Canada, published by educational publishers for use in a school setting, aimed at children
- ▶ Of those titles produced by non-educational publishers, 72.5% are aimed at children
  - ▶ Picture books make up the majority of these titles (58%), and represent the most languages (49; cf. early readers, which make up 18% of non-educational titles, but only across 12 languages)
- ▶ What few adult titles exist are primarily “folklore” (i.e., traditional stories) or nonfiction, largely compiled from oral texts collected by linguists and published by university presses
- ▶ While most educational books are monolingual, books published by non-educational presses tend to be bilingual

# Why is this important?

- ▶ Books as prestigious cultural objects
  - ▶ Comparison to dominant-language literature can be detrimental
- ▶ Books as an opportunity to use and maintain Indigenous literacy
  - ▶ Without a titles aimed at older children and adults, motivation to maintain literacy may decline
  - ▶ A wide and varied literature can engage and inspire second-language learners
- ▶ Back to Bernard (1997): books can document and preserve languages and provide economic incentives
- ▶ Books are timeless and relatively low-maintenance
  - ▶ Software programs, video games and apps can become obsolete with new technologies
  - ▶ Books - even e-books, provided they are produced in a stable format - don't have this problem



# Building a literary tradition in North American Indigenous languages

- ▶ Of course, creating more Indigenous language books is much easier said than done
- ▶ While Bernard (1997) argues that Indigenous language publishing houses can create economic incentives, for most North American language communities, there simply aren't enough speakers to make this viable
- ▶ Funding is the biggest problem: how can this be overcome?

# Creative Solutions for Funding

- ▶ Experiment with models, collaborate!
- ▶ Indigenous-owned presses in Canada (e.g., Nimbus Publishing, Gabriel Dumont Institute, Kegedonce Press) publish primarily English-language books of Indigenous interest, with some Indigenous language books
- ▶ Inhabit Media publishes two editions: a hardcover in English for mainstream audiences, and a paperback in Inuktitut
- ▶ Salina Bookshelf publishes bilingual books so titles are accessible to mainstream audiences
- ▶ Edwards (2007) advocates for a co-publishing model for picture books

# Concluding Remarks

## “Books. *Why?*”

-- Louise Erdrich, *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*

- ▶ “ [...] using the language should be regarded as something attractive, something that is done with enthusiasm to fire the imagination.”(Ager 2005)
- ▶ Literary traditions can help build prestige, engage learners and speakers, and preserve the language
- ▶ A few languages have a good start on building a body of literature, but all have a long way to go
- ▶ There are challenges, but there can be creative solutions, too

# References

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- ▶ Watahomigie, Lucille J. and Teresa L. McCarty. 1997. 'Literacy for what? Hualapai literacy and language maintenance.' In Nancy Hornberger. (Ed.) *Indigenous Literacies in the Americas: Language Planning from the Bottom Up*. 95-113. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.