

Why has there been a Recent Shift to using Transliteration for Days and Months in Te Reo?

Rochelle Mackintosh (Ngāti Porou, Ngāpuhi)

rochelle.mackintosh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This opinion piece aims to clarify the current shift of the days of weeks, and months of the year from 'Māorified words' (for example, Rāhina, Rātū) to the transliterations (for example, Mane, Tūrei) that some primary schools are implementing. This topic was raised at my daughters' mainstream primary school when the teachers decided to use transliterations for days of the week and months of the year. This got me thinking: Why are transliterations of days of the week and months becoming more popular again in mainstream primary schools? Should we use words that better represent a Te Ao Māori way of measuring time? Which version should we use, or does it matter?

Keywords: Te Reo Māori, transliterations, days of the week, Māorified words

Opinion

Words commonly used for days of the week and months of the year in the Māori language are based on a western calendar that includes two versions, one being transliteration or kupu arotau (loan words/alternative words) such as Mane, Tūrei, the other ngā rā o te wiki (days of the week) or "Māorified words" (as described by Mātāmua, 2020) such as Rāhina, Rātū. Ngā rā o te wiki version is referred to as the official name of the days of the weeks, advocated by the Māori Language Commission (Te Kete Ipurangi, 2024; Victoria University of Wellington, 2024). Either of these versions are acceptable to use in Aotearoa, New Zealand schools.

When I attended my local primary mainstream school in the 1980s in Gisborne, I remember being taught the transliteration words for the days of the week and months of the year. These transliteration words emerged when the first missionaries arrived in Aotearoa in the early nineteenth century and were often used before 1990 (Mātāmua, 2020). Since then, the official names (also referred to as Māorified names) have been

commonly used, such as Rāhina and Rātū. Additionally, traditional text and native speakers often use kupu arotau (loan words), whereas contemporary Māori learning environments usually favour ngā rā o te wiki version (māorilanguage.net 2024).

Attending Teachers Training College in the early 2000s, we were taught Rāhina and Rātū for the days of the week. At that time, it was explained that the Māorified words better reflected the word Monday in the Māori language, which means to honour the Moon. The word Rāhina stems from the word Māhina, which translates as the ancient name for the moon or the Roman god (Kupu o te Ra, 2024). The other days of the week are similar in honouring the different planets, such as Mars, Mercury and Jupiter, as shown in the table below. As a primary teacher of 15 years, I taught the official words rather than the loan words. So, this got me thinking: why are there some schools now shifting back to using transliterations?

Days of Week	Western time system (Roman god)	Western time system Māori names	Transliterations/loan words (Kupu arotau)
Monday	Day of the Moon (Luna)	Rā + Māhina (Rāhina)	Mane/Manei
Tuesday	Day of Mars	Rā + Tūmataunga (Rātū)	Tūrei
Wednesday	Day of Mercury	Rā + Apārangi (Rāapa)	Wenerei/Weneti
Thursday	Day of Jupiter	Rā + Pareārau (Rāpare)	Tāite/Taitei
Friday	Day of Venus	Rā + Mere Rāmere)	Paraire
Saturday	Day of Saturn	Rāhoroi	Hātarei
Sunday	Day of Sun (Sol)	Rātapu	Rātapu

This topic about using transliterations emerged recently when the teachers at my daughters' school began to use transliterations for the days of the weeks, and months of the year instead of the 'Maorified words' that they used to use. The school decided to shift to transliterations, as this was recommended when some of the teachers attended the Kura Ahurea course (Lower Hutt) in 2023. At this course, the presenter explained that ngā rā o te wiki (e.g., Rāhina, Rātū) were not Māori words and did not have Māori whakapapa. For instance, the Māori year begins in June (based on the lunar calendar) in contrast to January (the solar or Gregorian calendar). Hence, the days of the week and months of the year commonly utilised in mainstream schools are based on the Western calendar. Traditionally, Māori methods of viewing and measuring time were influenced by various measures such as stellar, lunar, seasonal and tidal calendars (tuhi.stationary,

2024). This reasoning has been promoted by Professor Rangānehu Mātāmua, a well recognised and respected Māori scholar. He has been one of the main catalysts for this shift back to transliterations of days of the week. Mātāmua provides an explanation of why transliterations for days of the week and months of the year should be utilised in comparison to the “Māorified words” such as Rāhina and Rātū. Mātāmua (2020) claims that we (Māori) need to decolonise our system of time as it is based on the coloniser’s system of time they brought with them to Aotearoa over a century ago. That being the Western or Gregorian calendar. He further explained that this calendar does not match the Māori lunar calendar. Historically, Māori time system was constructed on the sun, moon and stars, which is also known as the environmental calendar (Mātāmua, 2020). The advice given by Mātāmua is, therefore, when using the western or solar calendar, then use the words that mirror the meaning of these words that are transliteration.

Given this explanation, does this mean we should have transliterations for words based on a Western knowledge system to mirror that culture? If we look at words in Te Reo, for example, they are created that make sense in the Māori language. Take the word computer, for instance. The te reo word is ‘rorohiko’. This word can be split into two parts: ‘roro’ and ‘hiko’. Roro can be translated as brain and ‘hiko’ as electric/electronic (Te Aka Māori Dictionary, 2024). Combining these two words becomes the electronic brain. Therefore, the word computer is not a transliteration, nor does it have a Māori whakapapa, but the word in te reo has a meaning that makes sense in the Māori language. This raises the question, why do we have transliterations for some words in te reo?

Conclusion

It is essential, therefore, to question why there has been a recent shift to utilising transliteration of days of the week and months of the year, such as who instigated it and why. Regardless of what version we use (loan words or Māorified words) or whether we use both, it is crucial to have these conversations to understand the meanings of the words and why we use them. When we have these types of conversations, we gain a deeper understanding of the history and meaning of the words and how these words emerged, as well as how our thinking evolves.

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Glossary:

Hiko	Electronic, electric, electrical, power
Kupu arotau	Loan words, alternative words
Māhina	Moon
Māne	Monday (transliteration)
Māori whakapapa	Indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand's history, genealogy
Ngā marama	Months
Ngā rā o te wiki	Days of the week
Rāhina	Monday
Rātū	Tuesday
Roro	Brain
Rorohiko	Computer
Te Ao Māori	the Māori world
Te Reo Māori	Māori language
Tūrei	Tuesday (transliteration)