

## WORDS FROM MAORI IN NEW ZEALAND ENGLISH

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Loanwords in New Zealand English vocabulary are chiefly those introduced from Maori. Borrowings from Maori make up most unmistakably and uniquely New Zealand part of New Zealand English lexis. There is no overlap with Australian English here as there is in other areas of local vocabulary. The words are also very distinctive in their form and sound. English in general is heavily laden with consonants and consonant groups, and many words and syllables end in consonants. The syllable structure of Maori is very different; consonants occur only one at a time, and all syllables end in vowels. Maori has often been remarked upon as an aesthetically pleasing language to the ear (Edward Morris in the nineteenth century called it “the Italian of the south”), and its words inject an attractive Polynesian sound-quality into the borrowing language.

Maori loanwords are especially important for what they indicate about the past and present relationship between the two peoples and languages of New Zealand. They are a clear marker of the way the society has been and is made up, of biracial and bilingual situation.

Historically we can recognize two main periods of activity in borrowing from Maori into English, the first deriving from the British settlers’ and colonists’ experience in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the second arising out of the Maori cultural renaissance of the later decades of the twentieth century, lexical intake from Maori, once thought to be over and done with, has lately entered a vigorous new phase of growth.

The first impact of Maori on New Zealand English was largely confined to just three specific fields: Maori society itself; native flora and fauna; and proper names, especially place names. Most of the ‘essential’ Maori loanwords, those which virtually every New Zealander is likely to be familiar with, come from the earliest phase of lexical transfer from Maori into English. A selection is listed below. One or two of these are recorded from the late 1700s, but most were borrowed in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Maori life: haka (traditional war-like dance), kumara (New Zealand sweet potato), mana (authority, influence, prestige), marae (courtyard in front of a meeting house, focal point of Maori tribal life), pa (Maori village), wahine (Maori woman or wife), whare (Maori house or communal building).

Trees and plants: kauri (massive coniferous timber tree of North Island), manuka (common New Zealand shrub or small tree with aromatic leaves), pohutukawa (large spreading coastal tree with masses of bright crimson blossom appearing in December, New Zealand Christmas tree), rimu (red pine), totara (very large coniferous New Zealand forest tree).

Birds: kakapo (flightless New Zealand parrot), kea (large dark-green parrot), kiwi, moa (large extinct flightless New Zealand bird), tui (song bird with dark glossy plumage), weka (flightless brown bird).

Fish and shellfish: mako (shark), paua (large ear-shaped edible shellfish), tarakihi (silver-colored flood fish), bibi (edible shellfish).

Other animal life: huhu (beetle), Katipo (spider), tuatara (reptile), weta (grasshopper).

In addition there are of course Maori place names in abundance, from Cape Reinga to Tiwai Point. Only six of the country’s 20 largest urban areas by head oh population have Maori names (Tuaranga, Rotorua, Whangarie, Wanganui, Timaru and Kapiti), but detailed maps of New Zealand and its cities are dense with Maori, particularly in the northern half of

the North Island. For very many New Zealanders place names form the strongest point of contact they have with the Maori language.

Among other proper names there is Maori itself, and its companion Pakeha (light-skinned New Zealander). A few newspapers still treat Pakeha as a common noun and print the word with a small p, but its conversion to proper name status is now virtually complete.

Various Maori words double as both common and proper nouns in English use: kiwi/Kiwi is the obvious example, and ngaio (small round-headed coastal tree) and proper name Ngaio March; kumara, rangiora (shrub and small tree), tawa (forest tree) and other names of towns and suburbs.

It may surprise many people to find less familiar Maori vocabulary listed among the contents of an English dictionary, and this raises the interesting question, at what points does a Maori word become accepted as part of the New Zealand English vocabulary? There is no clear-cut answer on this. Some words are more integrated in English than others, but there is no well-defined line over which a word must will make the transition from foreign to naturalized status.

Uncommon Maori words will only be included in the dictionaries where some record of usage in English writings exists. The English vocabulary has no fixed limits, and it is only fitting that dictionaries of New Zealand English should cast a wide net for Maori loanwords because of their unique regional significance.

After the initial intake of Maori words by Pakeha to supply names for their new environment, a long period ensued when little more was borrowed, and some of what had been adopted fell into disuse in English contexts. This was an inevitable consequence of the sharp decline in fortunes of the Maori people and their culture in the decades of colonial rule after 1840. The Maori language, which had enjoyed considerable status and encouragement among the missionaries and settlers prior to 1840, was soon completely overshadowed by English in numbers of speakers and general standing. This unequal relationship lasted through the remainder of the nineteenth century and for a good part of the twentieth, eventually threatening the very survival of Maori. But the situation was to change.

What has happened in the last 20 to 25 years is that the historical tide has finally turned, and Maoridom has begun to recover his lost mana (influence, prestige). The current renaissance of Maori culture is part of a world-wide post-colonial movement of indigenous peoples seeking redress for historical injustices and a greater say in their own destinies. This cultural revival in Aotearoa (New Zealand) has greatly enhanced the status of Maori, and it has also the effect of reactivating the impact of Maori on New Zealand English. The flow of Maori loanwords has resumed, with some older terms being revived and many others appearing in English for the first time.

There is an important difference to observe between this recent use of Maori terms and the earlier nineteenth century phrase of borrowing. We described the latter as largely "receiver-oriented" and Pakeha-driven, inspired by the colonists need to name their new surroundings. However in this case the situation is reversed and the borrowing may be describe as "donor-oriented" and Maori-driven, since the initiative has come this time from Maori side of the relationship. In this way it is less a case now of English taking from Maori than Maori giving to English. Words have been introduced and given wider currency by Maori writers and speakers themselves in particular, in the course of making their voices heard and expressing their own perspective on Maori and bicultural matters for a wider New Zealand audience.

The current importation of Maori into New Zealand English is most noticeable in two fields. The new words are frequently encountered in the media, in articles, reports and public statements and so on. And they are also a prominent feature of the rapidly growing area of literature by Maori authors.

Though by no means confined to Maori writers and speakers, the transfer into English of Maori words provides an obvious lexical marker of the variety of New Zealand English known as Maori English.

In some literary and other texts not merely words but entire phrases and even sentences of Maori are incorporated, giving the writing a mixed, bilingual character. In such cases a writer goes beyond straightforward lexical borrowing, into what sociolinguistics refer to as code-mixing or code-switching, that is combining elements of two different languages or moving from one language into the other and back again, without the same utterance. It should be noted there is no clear dividing line between borrowing and code-switching, and so it is often difficult to say what counts as English and what remains Maori in these kinds of passages.

The recent revival of Maori borrowings presents obvious difficulties for many New Zealand readers and listeners. The loanwords for the most part are unlikely to become part of the active vocabularies of non-Maori. All the same those who want to understand Maori issues and Maori concerns have to be prepared to make efforts to widen their knowledge of Maori lexis, at least passively. Fortunately in many cases assistance is given to us in written language by putting the English meaning of a Maori item in a parenthesis or coordinated structure (for example “these early tupuna (ancestor) were typical East Polynesians”). Literary works and other publications which use a lot of Maori vocabulary often have an end-text glossary. But such help is not always provided, and this may sometimes be a deliberate decision on the writer’s part to throw down a challenge to the reader to learn some Maori, or as an indication that the writing is intended primarily for the Maori rather than for Pakeha.

Particularly where words drawn from the general Maori vocabulary are concerned even the New Zealand dictionaries are of only limited usefulness. Dictionaries always run a little way behind current usage, but in any case it is not feasible for them to include any and every Maori word that has been or might be found in an English sentence. For this wider and more occasional ‘one-off’ borrowing a Maori dictionary will often be necessary, the standard but now rather dated text is William’s Dictionary of the Maori Language; this was first compiled in 1844, and is now in its seventh edition (1971). A new mid-size work, the Reed Dictionary of Modern Maori (1995) by P.M. Pyan, is now the best reference work for the general reader. Shorter works are also available, for example the English-Maori, Maori-English Dictionary of Bruce Biggs (1990).