

CAPTAIN COOK'S SPELLING OF ENGLISH AND POLYNESIAN VOWELS

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The first written records of the Maori language and indeed of many of the other Polynesian dialects are to be found in the journals of Captain Cook, but the standardized spellings of these languages have been established for so long that many of the words as Cook spelt them are now barely recognizable.

Obviously the value of Cook's records depends on the correct interpretation of his system of spelling. A recorder of unfamiliar words, unless he is a trained linguist, will almost inevitably use a personal phonetic system based on his own pronunciation of his native language. The key, therefore, to Cook's spelling lies in his own pronunciation of English.

James Cook was born at Marton in the North Riding of Yorkshire, the son of a Scottish farm labourer from Roxburghshire and his Yorkshire-born wife. His formal education was limited to a few years in the village school at Great Ayton, in the same district where his father had become a farm manager. For eighteen months from the age of 17, Cook worked in a general store at Staithes on the Yorkshire coast before being apprenticed to Waller Brothers, ship-owners of Whitby, and for the next ten years he served in Yorkshire-based vessels. He then enlisted as an able seaman in the Royal Navy.

All the evidence indicates that he was not in close and lengthy contact with speakers of Standard English until his first voyage of discovery in the Pacific when he was much in the company of Joseph Banks, who had been educated at Eton and Oxford. The voyage began in 1768 when Cook was 40, by which time his speech patterns would have been well established, so that it is reasonable to suppose that he spoke the dialect of north-eastern Yorkshire, with possibly some early Scottish influence from his father.

Cook's careful study of navigation and related subjects as

an adult is reflected in his spelling of book terms, technical terms and longer words in general, which usually are spelt correctly, whereas more familiar words, probably acquired in childhood or early youth, frequently are represented "phonetically".

As is shown below, his personal phonetic system has its rules, which are applied equally to English and Polynesian words.

Twenty-three single vowels and vowel clusters used by Cook in his spelling of Polynesian words are treated separately. In each case Cook's own likely pronunciation of the vowel or vowel cluster is indicated by International Phonetic Association symbols enclosed in square brackets. A regularly corresponding southern English equivalent is also indicated phonetically in most cases.

The phonetic interpretation is justified by a number of examples of Cook's spelling of English words in each case. The assumption is then made that Cook would have used the same vowels or vowel clusters to indicate the same or similar sounds in Polynesian words, and examples are given.

In parenthesis after each Polynesian word is its modern conventional form, together with its volume/page reference to the Beaglehole edition of Cook's journals.

TABLE OF VOWELS AND VOWEL CLUSTERS

<u>A:</u> a1 [a]/[a:] str a2 [a] unstr a3 [ɛ:] aa [aʔa] ah [a:]/[aʔ] a11 [ɛ:] a12 [aɪ] au [ɔ:] augh	<u>E:</u> e1 [ɛ] str e2 [ɛ]/[ɪ] unstr e3 [ɪ:] str ea [ɪa]/[ɛa] ee [ɪ:] ei eiɪ [ɪ:]	<u>O:</u> o [ɔ]/[ɔ:] oa [ɔa] oi/oy [ɔɪ] oo [u:] ou [u:]/[au]/[ɔ:]/[ɔu] ough ow [u:]/[au]
	<u>I:</u> i1 [ɪ] i2 [aɪ] ie [ɪ:]	<u>U:</u> u1 [u] u2 [ɪu]
	<u>Y:</u> y1 [ɪ] unstr y2 [aɪ] str	

str = stressed

unstr = unstressed

A

a 1 [a]/[a:] stressed. Southern English equivalent: [æ]/[ɑ:]

English

platting
cabbin

asspect
vally

marcury
disarted

In general, Cook doubles the following consonant where the vowel is decidedly short. The last two words show the 18th century pronunciation of er.

Polynesian

pattoo (*patu* - I 200)
arreyo (*arioi* - I 128)

poenammoo (*pounamu* - II 168)
Whanno (*Fana* - II 410)

Latoo-Nipooroo (*Latunipulu* - II 257)
hahou (*kahu* - II 125)

As with English words, Cook often doubles the consonant after a short vowel in Polynesian words.

Several Polynesian words with a followed by r are given alternative spellings, which suggests that there was uncertainty in Cook's mind as to the length of the vowel.

Owharre (II 215) / Owharhe (I 141) (*O Fare*)
Marriwaggy (III 127) / Mariwaggy (III 125) (*Maealiuaki*)
Cook apparently failed to detect the e in this unfamiliar vowel cluster.

In general, Cook does not recognize the glottal stop and spells [aʔa] as a.

Happi (*Ha'apai* - III 102)
Fodua (*Fotuha'a* - III 103)

Taoofa (*Ta'aufa'a* - III 156)
Tata-eno (*Ta'ata -ino* - III 191)

patai (*pa'akai* - III 279)
Mopeha (*Mopiha'a* - II 431)

a 2 [a] unstressed. Southern English equivalent: [ə]

English

centinal

absance

heartaly
hostal

Usually the letter a is used in accordance with standard spelling but occasionally it represents e or i.

Polynesian

coumalla (*kumara* - III 168, note)
aheiya (*ahia* - II 232)

wharra (*fara* - III 88)
tarra (*taro* - II 502)

Maheina (*Mahine* - III 198)

In Polynesian words, a in final position generally represents an unstressed [a], but Cook uses it sometimes for other final unstressed vowels.

a 3 [ɛ:] stressed. Southern English equivalent: [eI]

English

prevale
safty

slane (*slain*)
daly (*daily*)

Polynesian

Tootaha (*Tuteha* - I 85)
Waheatua (*Vehiatua* - I 108)

Although it occurs frequently in his English words, Cook rarely uses this spelling for the Polynesian e.

aa [aʔa]

English

No examples.

Polynesian

Owhaa (*Fa'aa* - I 75)
Taawirry (*Ta'auipiri* - I 105)

haahow (*a'ahu/kakahu* - I 195)
Haa-an-no (*Ha'ano* - III 105)

Cook occasionally recognizes the glottal stop by doubling the vowel.

ah [a:]/[aʔ] Southern English equivalent: [a:]

English

No examples.

Polynesian

Mahuwe (*Maui* - I 111)
Tapah (*Tepa* - III 97)

Kahourah (*Kahura* - III 67)
Pahah (*Pa'a* - III 244)

ivahah (*va'a* - III 220)
Tou-ah-ah (*Koa'a* - III 491)

This spelling occurs 15 times, once in the log of his first voyage, once during the second voyage (*Apahiah* - II 212) and the remaining 13 times in the third voyage. There appears to have been an outside influence; it is noteworthy that Charles Clerke, who was with Cook on all three voyages, first as a lieutenant and finally as commander of the accompanying vessel, the *Discovery*, very frequently spelt final a as ah.

ai 1 [ɛ:] Southern English equivalent: [eI]

English

taisted
perswaided

regailing
laidy

compair'd

Polynesian

Mangia nooe nai naiwa
(*Mangaia nui neneva* - III 86)

mareeai
(*malie* - iii 152)

These are the only certain Polynesian examples to be found in Cook's journals. They occur late in the record, and Beaglehole considers that this spelling is due to his using the phonetic system devised by William Anderson, the surgeon, who accompanied him on his second and third voyages (III 86).

ai 2 [aɪ]

English

No examples.

Polynesian

Whaiurua (*Vaiurua* - II 212)
Oaitipeha (*Vaitepiha* - II 197)

haromai (*haramai* - I 281;
Beaglehole suggests *haeremai*)
Toobouai (*Tupua'i* - III 185)

marai (*marae* - III 213)

This spelling was used for [aʊ], [aʔʊ] and [æ] by Cook, who, like most English speakers, would probably have had difficulty in distinguishing these sounds. We may see here the influence of Joseph Banks who used it frequently, e.g. in a word list (I 286): *ecouwai* (*kauwae*), *haromai* (*haramai*), *erai* (*rae*).

au [ɔ:]/[a:]

English

gause (*gauze*)

laun (*lawn*)

Polynesian

Pangymadoo (*Pangaimotu*-III 124) watarau (*fatarau* - II 233)

caurey (*kore* - II 573;

Mauraua (*Maurua* - II 430)

Beaglehole suggests *kahore* or *kaore*) Tapoamanau (*Tupua'i manu*-I 140)

Very few words, either English or Polynesian, are spelt with au in Cook's journals, so that it is difficult to determine which sound it is intended to represent. In the speech of north-eastern Yorkshire and southern Durham, two different pronunciations of the vowel in words spelt with au or aw are common: [a:] and [ɔ:].

ough

This spelling occurs in only one word: *Vaugh-waugh* (*Vava'u* - III 112) where it represents two different sounds: [a] and [aʔu].

E

e ɪ [ɛ] stressed. Southern English equivalent: [ɛ]

English

medow

plesent

emence (*immense*)

setelite (*satellite*)

lettice (*lattice*)

sherk (*shark*)

veisible (*visible*)

wench (*winch*)

prented (*printed*)

Cook's spelling suggests that his own pronunciation of the vowel in certain words was closer to [ɛ] than to the normal [a] or [ʊ]. An alteration which he made from "sacrefice" to "sacrefice" indicates that he had some difficulty in deciding which letter best represented the sound he used.

Polynesian

Terry Derry (*Teri' irere* - III 216) Oreddee (*O Reti* - III 187)
Koheghenooee (*Ko Hekenui* - II 575) Tettaha (*Tata'a* - III 199)

wenua (*whenua* - III 87)

In many cases, but not always, Cook doubled the consonant after e pronounced [ɛ], thus avoiding confusion with e pronounced [ɹ:].

e 2 [ɛ]/[ɹ] unstressed. Southern English equivalents: [ə]/[ɪ].

English

entrence
gunel

liqer
devulge

limet
erregular

Polynesian

[ɛ]
matte (*mate* - I 136)
age (*ake* - I 281)

[ɹ]
Annuwhe (*Anuhi* - I 107)
Toetoe (*Tuhituhi* - II 117)
Otaheite (*Tahiti* - I 143)

Beaglehole comments on 'Cook's talent for confusing his "e"s and "i"s' (I 108). In common with many Pakehas in later times, Cook apparently found it difficult to distinguish between unstressed [ɛ] and [ɹ] in Polynesian speech.

e 3 [ɹ:] stressed

English

conceve

perced

Polynesian

teto (*tito* - III 227)
Mopeha (*Mopihaa* - II 431)

feghega (*fekika* - I 262)
Ohetiroa (*O Hitiroa* - (156))

torromedo (*toromiro* - II 347)

This is the spelling Cook used most frequently for the i of modern Polynesian orthography.

ea [ɛa] Southern English equivalents: [ɛ:]/[eɪ].

English

compleat
speach

beheavour

creators (*creatures*)
undeceaved

In the dialect of north-eastern Yorkshire, this spelling combination is generally pronounced as [ɛa].

Polynesian

[ɛa]

Waheatua (*Vehiatua* - I 108)

Debbe-de-bea (*Tipitipia* - II 212)

[ea]

Oteavanua (*O Teavanui* - III 253)

Ulietea (*Ra'iatea* - I 139)

The last two words also show Cook's apparent failure to distinguish between the Polynesian [ɛ] and [ɛ:].

ee [ɛ:] Southern English equivalent: [ɪɪ].

English

beeds
extreem

meerly
squeeked

Polynesian

pahee (*pahi* - I 131)

Oreddee (*O Reti* - III 187)

gooree (*kuri* - II 262)

oobee (*ubi* - II 529)

Cook does not distinguish between [ɛ:] and [ɛʔɛ], as may be seen in the case of "earee" (*e ari'i* - III 217).

This spelling is used almost as often as e to represent the i of modern Polynesian orthography.

ei [ɛ:] Southern English equivalent: [ɪɪ].

English

cheif
peices (Spelt elsewhere as: peeces)

yeilded
teight (*tight*)

greif

Polynesian

Huaheine (*Huahine* - I 138)

Maheina (*Mahine* - III 198)

veheina (*vahine* - III 271)

heiva (*hiva* - I 112)

aheiya (*ahia* - II 232.)

This is the only instance of a strengthening of "ei" with "y".)

Tooboweitoa (*Tupouto'a* - II 118)

Otaheite (*O Tahiti* - I 143/II 194.)

Also spelt: Otahiete - I118/II200; Otahite-I107)

Aheinomouwe (This name for the North Island of New Zealand as recorded by Cook has been variously interpreted as *He Ahi no Maui*, *Te Hinga a Maui*, and *He Hi no Maui* - I 243.)

These are the only Polynesian words in which Cook uses the combination ei. Except in the case of "Tooboweitoa" - where it is an interpolation - it is always preceded by h. Anderson, too, writes "Otaheite" (III 801), "wa'heine" (III 830) and "maheine" (III 830). Although Cook's spelling of these words varied, his last references to Tahiti and Huahine in a letter written to the Admiralty from Unalaska on 20 Oct. 1778 has both spelt with ei (III 1530/1531).

I

i 1 [ɪ] Southern English equivalent: [I].

English

villige

chist (*chest*. In the dialect of north-east Yorkshire the word *kist* is common.)

pritty

hild (*held*)

hilth (*health*)

Polynesian

Whidea (*Hitia'a* - I 98)

Apahiah (*O Pa'aia* - II 212)

Teerawhitte (*Terawhiti* - II 284)

timorodee (*ti moro iti* - I 127)

Ohetiroa (*Hitiroa* - I 156)

i 2 [aɪ]

English

slitely

rhime

difiance

intire

Polynesian

Tiarreboo (*Taiarapu* - I 107) Tidooah (*Taitua* - III 228)
Happi (*Ha'apai* - III 102) Tubi (*Tupai* - II 430)
Mangia (*Mangaia* - III 80) Tiratoutou (*Tairatutu* - III 70)

This spelling of [aɪ] is the one which Cook uses most frequently in Polynesian words.

ie [ɪ:] Southern English equivalent: [Iɪ].

English

recieve whiete (*white*)
siezed bieght (*bight*)

Polynesian

Otahiete (*O Tahiti* - I 118) togie (*toki* - III 160)
Wautieu (*Atiu* - III 87) papalangie (*papalangi* - III 178)

Tierawettee (*Terawhiti* - III 73. On the same page also spelt: Teerawittee.)

Both ei and ie are infrequent spellings for the Polynesian [ɪ:] and there is no obvious rule governing Cook's choice between them. Furthermore, the two letters are often written exactly the same and share a single dot, so that it is almost impossible to decide which form is intended.

In "Tierawettee" we have another example of Cook mishearing a Polynesian [ɛ].

Beaglehole comments that this spelling of Tahiti "is said to represent the classical pronunciation of the name, with its forced diphthong and vowel glide, better than the conventionalized *Tahiti*." (I 118), but the evidence of the northern Yorkshire pronunciation of ie and the spellings "togie" and "papalangie" is against any deliberate intention on Cook's part to represent this classical pronunciation.

Y

y ɪ [ɪ] unstressed. Southern English equivalent: [I].

English

dirictly (and all other words where standard English spelling has a final y).

Polynesian

Taawirry (*Ta'auipiri* - I 105) tiparray (*taparahi* - II 224)
Opoony (*O Puni* - I 149. Mariwaggy (*Maealiuaki* - III 157)
Elsewhere (II 221) romy (*rumi* - III 215)
this is spelt: Terry Derry (*Teri'irere* - III 216)
Opoone.) worry worry (*vare vare* - III 216)

These are the only examples of Cook's use of y to represent [ʌ] in Polynesian words. In the last three words he again confuses [ʌ] and [ɛ].

y 2 [aʌ]

English

cyth (*scythe*) pye
tyed tryall

Polynesian

tabu avy (*tapu a vai* - III 130) Tyo (*Taio* - I 90. Also occurs
Tovy poenammu (*Te Wai Pounamu* - (II 206) with the spell-
I 243. Spelt ing: Tiyo)
elsewhere (II Pangymaudoo (*Pangaimotu* - III
171): Tavai 124. Spelt else-
Poenammmoo.) where (III 143)
mamity (*ma'a maitai* - II 423) Pangimaudoo)

These are the only Polynesian words in which [aʌ] is spelt as y.

o

o [ɔ]/[ɔ:] Southern English equivalents: [ɒ]/[ɔ:].

English

boddy flourishing
tollerable bost (*boast*)

Polynesian

torromedo (*toromiro* - II 347) Tringoboohee (*Te Ringa o puhi*
Ogodoo (*O Kotu* - III 102) - II 575)
Mathiabo (*Matahiapo* - I 109) romy (*romi* - III 215)

oa [ɔa] Southern English equivalent: [oʊ]/[ɔ:].

English

<u>cloath</u> ed	<u>appload</u> ed
<u>joak</u> (<i>joke</i>)	<u>exploar</u> ed
<u>sloap</u> ing	

Polynesian

<u>Coaa</u> (<i>Koa'a</i> - III 70)	<u>Koamaroo</u> (<i>Koamaru</i> - I 245)
<u>Ohetiroa</u> (<i>O Hitiroa</i> - I 156)	<u>boa</u> (<i>pua'a</i> - II 211)

Although the spelling combination oa is pronounced in at least three different ways in northern Yorkshire, as [ua], [ɔa] and [ɔ:], Cook consistently uses this spelling to represent [ɔa] in Polynesian words. "Boa" is the only exception.

oi/oy [ɔɪ]

English

<u>voide</u>	<u>oyl</u>
<u>choise</u>	<u>oysterige</u> (<i>ostrich</i>)

There is no evidence that Cook used oi and oy to represent different sounds. In its spelling the diphthong is no different from its two components, [ɔ] and [ɪ]. Cook's "oysterige" may be regarded as the personal aberration of a seaman more familiar with oysters than ostriches.

Polynesian

<u>atoi</u> (<i>to'i</i> - II 229)	<u>arreoy</u> (<i>arioi</i> - I 128)
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oo [u:]

English

<u>loose</u> (<i>lose</i>)	<u>works</u>
<u>coomb</u> (<i>comb</i>)	<u>smook</u>

These spellings clearly reflect northern Yorkshire pronunciations. Cook was uncertain about "smoke" which he spells elsewhere as "smoak".

Polynesian

<u>Tiarreboo</u> (<i>Taiarapu</i> - I 107)	<u>Footoona</u> (<i>Futuna</i> - II 524)
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Opoony (*O Puni* - I 149. Also
(II 221) spelt: *Opoone*)

gooree (*kuri* - II 262. Also
(II 170) spelt: *goure*)

As an indication of Cook's use of oo, - and also ou to represent [u:], he spells the Polynesian pronunciation of his own name as both "Otootee" (II 249) and "Toute" (II 207). Also note the alternative spellings for *kuri*.

ou [u:]/[au] Southern English equivalents: [aʊ]/[Oʊ].

English

fouls (*fowls*)

crowded (*crowded*)

chouse (*choose*)

fould (*fold*)

On the available evidence there is no clear reason for Cook's choice between ou and ow in spelling individual words. In his English words, either spelling may represent [u:], [aʊ] or occasionally [ɔ:], thus reflecting ambiguities in the speech of north-eastern Yorkshire.

Where ou or ow represents southern English [aʊ], e.g. *now*, *house*, the same pronunciation is generally found in north-western Yorkshire, whereas in south Durham the usual pronunciation is [u:]. Where these vowel combinations represent southern English [Oʊ], e.g. *snow*, they are sounded [ɔ:] in north-western Yorkshire and [a:] in south Durham.

The dialect of north-eastern Yorkshire, where Cook lived his early life, has an intermediate character and all these variant pronunciations occur, so that we cannot be sure of his pronunciation of individual words containing ou or ow.

Polynesian

[u:]

Oorou (*Uru* - II 224)

goure (*kuri* - II 170)

pattou (*patu* - II 118)

coumalla (*kumala* - II 168 Note)

Kahoura (*Kahura* - III 62)

Oboonohou (*Opunohu* - III 225)

[aʊ]

Mouwe (*Mau* - I 243)

Potattou (*Potatau* - II 210)

parou (*parau* - II 426)

warou (*ua rau* - II 408)

[ɔ:]

Aotourou (*Ahutoru* - II 212)

[ɔʊ]

Tooboulangee (*Tupoulangi* - III 97)

[ɛu]
toutou (*teuteu* - II 424)

Cook does not recognize the unfamiliar [ɛu]. A quantitative analysis of his representation of the sound [u:] shows that of 95 occurrences in Polynesian words, 69 are spelt oo, 22 ou and 4 ow.

ough

On three occasions, Cook used the spelling ough, each time representing a different sound.

[au] Feenough (*Finau* - III 100)

[ɔu] Toobough (*Tupou* - III 122)

[ɛu] Talough (*Tareu* - III 225)

All four of the examples of Cook's use of ough and ough occur in the journal of his third voyage.

ow [u:]/[au] Southern English equivalents: [au]/[ou].

English

cloudy
alowd

rowled

blowen
owning (*awning*)

This spelling is not common for English words in Cook's journals and Polynesian words spelt with ow number only one-third as many as those with ou. In half of these it has the pronunciation [u:]; in one quarter it represents [au].

Polynesian

[u:]

ahow (*ahu* - II 208)

Ahowe (*Ahui* - I 109)

pattow (*patu* - II 352)

[au]

Tupapow (*Tupapau* - III 191)

mattow (*matau* - I 111. Also spelt "mattaow" where ow = [u].)

Wiverow (*Tuivirau* - I 110. Beaglehole quotes this name from Corney in III Descriptive Index, but also suggests *Vaivero*. The latter appears unlikely as there is no example elsewhere of Cook's spelling [ɔ:] as ow.)

[ɔu]
Toobow (*Tupou* - III 112)

Mowtohora (*Mou-tohora* - I 190)

[aɔ]
whow (*whao* - I 250)

[ɛu]
towtow (*teuteu* - II 234)

U

u 1 [u] Southern English equivalents: [ʌ]/[ɜː]/[ə].

English

surff
nutt

gunel
dextrusly

Polynesian

whenua (*fenua* - I 107)
Annuwhe (*Anuhi* - I 107)

Mahuwe (*Mau*i - I 111)
tabuu (*tapu* - III 129)

u 2 [ɯ] Southern English equivalent: [ju].

English

nusence
insuing

juce

suting (*suiting*)
stupelating (*stipulating*)

Polynesian

Onnuatabutabu (*O Niua tapu tapu* - III 162)

This is the only definite example of a Polynesian [ɯ] spelt as u.

-:-:-:-:-:-:-:-

Captain Cook, a competent and conscientious recorder, never claimed to be a linguist and was hampered by the ambiguities of conventional English spelling. For him, too, there was the further difficulty that his home district of north-eastern Yorkshire was a dialectal border zone as regards certain

sounds, notably [a_u]/[u:].

He certainly appears to have misheard his informants in some cases, but he was such a precise man and a careful observer of detail in other matters that it would have been completely out of character for him to have been slipshod in recording Polynesian words. This opinion is strengthened by several occurrences in his journals of words which he crossed out and rewrote in order to represent their sounds more accurately.

Moreover, we cannot altogether discount the possibility that some anomalies are due to personal or local variations in the speech of his Polynesian informants.

However, the foregoing analysis shows that Captain Cook's spelling, despite its aberrations, is basically systematic and directly related to his own pronunciation of English.

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