

PRONUNCIATION OF MAORI WORDS

By A. Morris Jones

Some years ago I contributed to this magazine some instruction on the pronunciation of Maori words. Since then many junior members have enrolled with the Society and many children in school groups are also receiving the magazine; it is particularly for these young folk the following instruction is written to help them avoid the ingrained habits of mispronunciation many adults have, and it is hoped that adults will also make use of and profit by it.

Speakers of good English should have little difficulty in pronouncing Maori words correctly because all sounds of Maori speech are heard when good English is spoken. Advantage is taken of this fact by using selected English words to illustrate Maori vowels.

As the terms vowel, consonant and syllable are used in this instruction it is advisable to explain them before proceeding further.

A vowel is a pure sound uttered in one breath with the mouth well open, and with no movement of the tongue or lips whilst it is being uttered; it may be short or long and must be free from any off glide.

A consonant, in Maori, is a sound that cannot be uttered without an accompanying vowel sound. Give to each consonant its customary English sound, except t, which is softened in pronunciation by touching with the tongue the upper front teeth; also, r should not be rolled.

A syllable is a unit of speech consisting of a vowel alone or a consonant and a single vowel combined; the vowel always follows the consonant in Maori as you will see by the table. By recognising its syllables the pronunciation of a long Maori word becomes easy. All syllables of Maori speech are contained in the following table, which is headed by short English words each with a vowel letter having precisely the sound of the same vowel letter in Maori.

Readers are warned to take no notice of the letters e in the word piece because both are silent in the standard English pronunciation of this word, which is as though it were spelt pis, with the i having the same sound as double e in peep, a word which also illustrates the sound of Maori i.

Although the vowel e in men has a short sound in standard English speech, you are advised to pronounce it and all vowels and syllables in the table with a strong and well sus-

tained sound, as it is easier to check for purity of pronunciation by doing so.

In using the table commence by pronouncing the English word heading the first column; then pronounce the vowel alone and then the following syllables of the column down to the bottom. Do the same with each vowel in turn and when satisfied you have mastered the sound of each, work through the table in lines crosswise; finally do some dodging about to gain fluency.

TABLE OF SYLLABLES

Harp	Men	Piece	Torn	Rule
a	e	i	o	u
ha	he	hi	ho	hu
ka	ke	ki	ko	ku
ma	me	mi	mo	mu
na	ne	ni	no	nu
pa	pe	pi	po	pu
ra	re	ri	ro	ru
ta	te	ti	to	tu
wa	we	wi	wo	wu
wha	we	whi	who	whu
nga	nge	ngi	ngo	ngu

It is of interest that when given their right lengths, forty-one of the syllables and all of the vowels in the above table are actually one-syllable Maori words, and so in reading it you are in fact reading Maori. All Maori words exceeding one syllable in length, however long, can be formed by use of the table.

Two lengths, termed long and short, are used with Maori vowels and it is very important to use their correct lengths because words having the same spelling are given different meanings depending on the vowel lengths used; care is therefore necessary to make the difference in length perceptible when speaking. In printed Maori a mark termed a macron above a vowel is the usual indication of a long sound, and its absence implies the short sound. It is not good practice to double print a vowel to indicate the long sound as there are many Maori words spelt with a double vowel each of which requires to be given its correct measure of length to preserve its right pronunciation and meaning. For instance, awaawa (valley) and tūāahu (a sacred place) would lose meaning if one long sound were given the double vowels; also as the vowel a in the causative prefix whaka is always