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From *Lundi* to *Somvaar*: A Linguistic and Cultural Examination of Day Names in French and Hindi

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Abstract

This study investigates the historic genesis, cultural meanings and linguistic forms of the 'names of the seven days of the week' in two distinct but comparable traditions, i.e. French and Hindi. It also highlights the linguistic similarities between these two languages, which are different from each other otherwise. The names of days of the week are taken, even though they appear very different and are rarely compared directly to analyse the similarities. Further, the study also highlights the conjunctions in how two languages use names of days of the week. By joining etymological examination, comparative structure, phonetics, and sociocultural interpretation, it shows that while both systems map weekdays onto planetary deities or celestial bodies, they do so through different historical pathways (Latin–Roman Christianization for French; Sanskrit–Hindu astronomical/astrological tradition for Hindi).

Research Gap: There is scarce scholarly literature and information available on the comparison of these two languages in detail. Comparative study of these two languages is partly because secondary data are minimal. It is difficult to research a topic on which there is petite information available in books, archives, online, journals, etc.

Keywords: French, days of the week, Hindi, etymology, culture, calendar, relative linguistics, morphology

1. Introduction

Why 'Day' Names Matter: In the language context and cultural time capsule, it represents one of the most important etymological structures, figuring how civilisations conceptualised time through their understanding of the universe and celestial forces, preserving ancient worldviews in everyday vocabulary.

Despite no cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparison between the two languages, there are universal etymological domains in the days of the week among both languages. Today, the names of the week in French encode cosmological knowledge, spiritual influence, ancient contacts, and geomorphological patterns that mirror deeper structural properties of the Hindi language. In any region, the names of days of the week are mostly associated with their history. In spite of the huge differences, this paper compares French and Hindi day names with the twin aims of (1) documenting their etymological and morphological structure and (2) interpreting the cultural values and communicative practices associated with them.

The days of the week don't use capital letters. The same applies to the names of months[1].

Days in English	Days in French	Pronunciation
Monday	Lundi	luhn-dee
Tuesday	Mardi	mahr-dee
Wednesday	Mercredi	mehr-cruh-dee
Thursday	Jeudi	zhuh-dee
Friday	Vendredi	vahn-druh-dee
Saturday	Samedi	sahm-dee
Sunday	Dimanche	dee-mahnsh

Table 1: *Days of the week- "Les jours de la semaine" (in French)*

The choice of French and Hindi permits a comparison across two major Indo-European branches—Romance and Indo-Aryan—which share, at a very distant level, a common ancestry yet have undergone divergent histories of cultural influence (Roman/Christian Europe vs. Indic/Hindu South Asia). Despite their differences, both languages exhibit a planetary/deity mapping in their weekday systems, making them particularly instructive for comparative study.

2. Background and literature

As linguistic artefacts, the names of the week are far more than simple historical markers and disclose profound understandings into the social, cosmological, and spiritual foundations of cultures. While examining French and Hindi day names side by side, remarkable parallels and fascinating divergences have been discovered that illuminate the knowledge of how different civilisations have conceptualised time through the lens of tradition, astrology, and divine cosmology. The genesis of the seven-day week traces its roots to the ancient Sumerians, at least back millennia. It is based on the time taken by the moon to enter from one phase to another, which is approximately seven days. Also, the propagation of Christianity and Jewish tradition helped to set this concept, which they believed that "God created the world in seven days, not thirteen." (Hollandbeck, 2016).

Research on weekday names often intersects with studies in historical linguistics, calendar history, and cultural anthropology. Classical scholarship shows that the modern European weekday names derive from Latin and Roman planetary/diurnal gods, later reframed through Christian practices (e.g., dominica for Sunday). In the South

[1] https://www.thefrenchexperiment.com/learn-french/days-of-week

Asian context, weekday names derive from Sanskrit terms associated with the navagraha (the nine celestial influences in traditional astronomy and astrology). It is noted in the comparative works that both traditions eventually plan days onto seven conventional planets, reflecting a shared Greco-Roman and Indic cosmological legacy facilitated by cultural exchange over the ages.

It was Julius Caesar who made massive modifications to the annual *nundinal* calendar (inherited from the Etruscans) of eight days and ten months in ancient Rome. They made it seven days and named each day after one of the seven planets (Bennett, 2004).

It is evident that in Hindi, the names of the days of the week scientifically correspond to Hindu deities and their associated celestial bodies, reflecting the sophisticated astronomical knowledge embedded in Vedic traditions. These names end with वार (*vaar*, meaning "day") like सोमवार (*Somvaar*) honors Som, the Moon deity; मंगलवार (*Mangalvaar*) celebrates Mangal (Mars); बुधवार (*Budhvaar*) represents Budh (Mercury); गुरुवार (*Guruvaar*) worships Guru or Brihaspati (Jupiter); शुक्रवार (*Shukravaar*) honors Shukra (Venus); शनिवार (*Shanivaar*) represents Shani (Saturn); and रविवार (*Ravivaar*) celebrates Ravi, the Sun god (Racheal, 2019).

The days of the week in French are derived mainly from Roman gods and conventional planets, like many Romance languages, while preserving early Greco-Roman universal and mythological traditions. The ancient history of France reveals its fascinating stories rooted in mythology, language evolution and origin. Learning from where it has come from not only enriches knowledge but also offers an understanding of different languages and their cultures. But why are the names of the week in French named the way they are? French days' names are one of the first things French learners' encounter. It is almost similar to the many European languages; French also inherited much from Latin and was influenced by Roman mythology, further shaped by Christianity. Here are the days of the week in French; each day represents a celestial body or deity, reflecting both the Roman gods and their association with planets (Adetunji, 2018). *Lundi,* i.e. Monday, is a moon day, which is *Lune* in the French language. *Lundi* derived from the Latin word dies Lunae (Moon's day), mardi honours Mars, i.e., Tuesday, the god of war, while mercredi (Wednesday) celebrates Mercury, the messenger of the gods. *Jeudi* (Thursday) comes from Jupiter (king of gods), *vendredi* (Friday) from Venus (goddess of love), and *samedi* (Saturday)from Saturn. After this, it breaks this pattern especially when it comes to Sunday, i.e. Dimanche in French, deriving from dies Dominicus (Lord's day), reflecting Christian influence on the Roman calendar system (White, 2025).

Cultural Identity through Language

These naming conventions validate how 'name of days of week' transcends mere functionality, becoming a vehicle for preserving religious theories, planetary acquaintance, and cultural worldviews. The persistence of these ancient systems in modern languages underscores the enduring power of mythology and astronomy in shaping linguistic expression and collective memory across millennia (Adrian, 2024).

Shared Cosmological Foundation

Despite geographic and cultural distances, both naming systems reveal a shared human impulse to organise time through celestial observation and divine attribution, linking daily life to cosmic rhythms.

3. Data and methodology

3.1 Data

The primary data consist of the standard; modern-day lexical forms used for weekdays in French and in Standard Hindi. For clarity, Table 1 presents the forms, associated planet/deity, and basic etymological notes.

Day (English)	French	Latin origin / note	Hindi (Devanagari)	Transliteration	Sanskrit root / note
Sunday	dimanche	dominica (Lord's day)	रविवार	Ravivaar	*Ravi* (Sun)
Monday	lundi	lunae (of the Moon)	सोमवार	Somvaar	*Soma* (Moon)
Tuesday	mardi	martis (Mars)	मंगलवार	Mangalvaar	*Mangala* (Mars)
Wednesday	mercredi	mercurii (Mercury)	बुधवार	Budhwaar	*Budha* (Mercury)
Thursday	jeudi	jovis (Jupiter)	गुरुवार / बृहस्पतिवार	Guruvaar / Brihaspativaar	*Brihaspati* (Jupiter)
Friday	vendredi	veneris (Venus)	शुक्रवार	Shukravaar	*Shukra* (Venus)
Saturday	samedi	sabbati (Sabbath) / sabbatum	शनिवार	Shanivaar	*Shani* (Saturn)

Table 2: *Weekday names: French and Hindi (modern standard forms)*

Notes: The Hindi suffix *-vaar* (Devanagari: वार) corresponds to the English *-day* and indicates the day of the week. French orthography preserves historical links with Latin and Old French endings; lexical changes reflect phonological evolution from Classical Latin.

3.2 Methodology

1. **Etymological analysis**: tracing each name to its historical source (Latin, Sanskrit, or other). Where necessary, morphological decomposition isolates roots and suffixes.
2. **Phonological/morphological comparison**: identifying sound changes, suffixation patterns, and morphological transparency (e.g., the transparency of the derivation is to modern speakers).
3. **Cultural-linguistic interpretation**: examining religious and calendrical influences, idiomatic usage, and sociolinguistic distribution.

4. **Translation and pedagogy**: assessing practical implications when translating or teaching weekdays across the two languages.

The approach is primarily qualitative, integrating descriptive linguistics with cultural analysis.

4. Etymology and morphology: a close look

4.1 The French system

French weekday names are direct descendants of Latin terms that associated each day with a celestial body or religious observance. The Latin *dies* (day) combined with the genitive case of planetary names (e.g., *Lunae dies* 'day of the Moon') evolved phonologically and morphologically into Modern French (e.g., *lundi*). Key processes include vowel reduction, consonant cluster simplification, and lexical borrowing from ecclesiastical Latin in the case of *dimanche* (from *dies dominica*) (Taylor, 2023).

Two special cases illustrate religion-driven lexical change: *dimanche* (Sunday)—from Latin *dominica*, reflecting Christian sanctification of Sunday as the Lord's day—and *samedi* (Saturday), whose Latin antecedent *sabbatum* (Sabbath) links to Judaeo-Christian practice. Thus, French weekday lexemes preserve both pagan planetary nomenclature and later Christian reinterpretation.

4.2 The Hindi system

Hindi weekday names generally follow Sanskritic forms which are mapped onto the *navagraha*: Som (Moon), Mangal (Mars), Budha (Mercury), Brihaspati (Jupiter), Shukra (Venus), Shani (Saturn), and Ravi (Sun). The productive suffix -*vaar* derives from Sanskrit *vAr*, meaning 'day' or 'time period'. The Hindi formations (e.g., *Somvaar*) are morphologically transparent to speakers familiar with Sanskrit-derived lexicon.

Several Hindi names reflect not only astronomical but religious/astrological salience. For example, *Guru* (in *Guruvaar*) references Brihaspati, the priestly teacher deity associated with Jupiter—hence multiple synonyms (e.g., *Guruvaar* vs. *Brihaspativaar*) coexist in idiomatic or register-specific usage.

5. Phonological and morphological comparison

5.1 Suffixation: -di(e)/-day vs. -vaar

A central morphological parallel is the presence of a day-marking suffix: French does not have an overt suffix meaning 'day' in the synchrony of Modern French (the -di in historical Latin *dies* survives only as a fossilized element), whereas Hindi retains the productive suffix -*vaar* that transparently marks the lexical items as days. In translation and language learning, -*vaar* provides a helpful morphological cue that French lacks.

5.2 Sound change and transparency

French names are often less transparent etymologically to a modern speaker without historical knowledge (e.g., *mercredi* does not transparently reveal *Mercury* to all speakers). Hindi names, by contrast, tend to semantically transparent to speakers familiar with Sanskrit-derived vocabulary: *Shukravaar* clearly contains *Shukra* (Venus) + *vaar* (day).

5.3 Loanword and contact influences

Both languages show evidence of contact: French weekday names reflect Roman religious history and later Christian liturgy; Hindi weekday names reflect indigenous Sanskritic astronomy and astrology, though both traditions share a deep Indo-European astronomical lexicon and possibly distant mutual influences through Hellenistic astronomical transmission to South Asia.

6. Cultural meanings and sociolinguistic patterns

6.1 Religious and calendrical practices

Despite many believing it is partially true, that weekdays in French come from Roman gods. It traces to the Babylonian era. Originally, they used to have seven days a week and associated each day with a different deity. Each deity was supposed to be powerful on their day. Further, the Romans adopted this idea of a seven-day week, and hence each date relates to the god in some manner[2]. In French-speaking contexts, the Christian liturgical calendar historically shaped weekday observance (e.g., feast days, Sunday being, the primary day of worship). The lexical form *dimanche* foregrounds Christianity. In contemporary secular France, the religious charge is reduced but remains culturally recognisable (e.g., public holidays organised around Christian festivals). There are more beliefs to keep it seven days; number seven is considered lucky, and others are associated with astronomy[3]

In Hindi-speaking contexts, weekday names are closely linked with Hindu religious practice and astrology. Each day is associated with specific rituals, dietary customs, or astrological prescriptions for favorable activities—practices that remain active in many communities. For instance, some devotees observe fasts on particular days (e.g., *Somvaar* fasts dedicated to Shiva in parts of India).

6.2 Idioms, collocations and discourse

Both languages use weekday terms in idiomatic expressions. French idioms emphasize schedule and routine (e.g., *lundi matin* as a prototypical work-day phrase), while Hindi idioms often connect days with auspiciousness and ritual practice. Corpus-based work would further specify common collocations and frequency distributions in spoken vs. written registers.

6.3 Social stratification and register

In Hindi, register variation permits synonyms (e.g., *Guruvaar* vs. *Brihaspativaar*), where higher-register or formal contexts may prefer fuller Sanskritic forms. In French, register differences are less about lexical alternatives for day names and more about their usage (e.g., calendar notation, formal invitations, religious contexts).

In a different example, Lera Boroditsky (1999) asks, "Does the language you speak affect how you think about the world?" taken in three experiments. She observed that the way 'time' is observed differently in English and Mandarin —English predominantly considers time as horizontal, whereas Mandarin describes time commonly as

[2] https://www.clozemaster.com/blog/days-of-the-week-in-french/

[3] https://silvercat.home.blog/other-pages/etymologies-of-the-names-of-the-days-of-the-week/

vertical. This variation in time between the two languages is mirrored in the thought process of the different language speakers (Boroditsky, 2000).

In one study, Mandarin speakers tend to think about time vertically only, even when thinking in English. Also noted, they were faster to confirm that February comes earlier than March. This also depends on the age of Mandarin–English bilinguals when they first began to learn English, and vice versa. “It is concluded that (1) language is a powerful tool in shaping thought about abstract domains and (2) one's native language plays an important role in shaping habitual thought (e.g., how one tends to think about time) but does not entirely determine one's thinking in the strong Whorfian sense.”

"The **Whorfian sense** (or Whorfian hypothesis/linguistic relativity) refers to the idea that the language a person speaks influences, shapes, or restricts their thought processes, perception of reality, and cognitive habits. Named after American linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf, it posits that the language structure—its grammar, lexicon, and syntax—provides a lens through which speakers view and organize the world, meaning that speakers of different languages may conceptualize reality differently." [4]

7. Translation issues and pedagogical implications

Translating weekdays between French and Hindi is typically straightforward at the lexical level because of shared referential mapping to calendar days. However, several issues merit attention:

1. **Cultural connotations:** *Dimanche* carries Christian historical connotations that may not map precisely onto *Ravivaar*; translators should be sensitive when translating historical or religious texts.
2. **Morphological cues:** Hindi *vaar* (day) aids comprehension for learners; French lacks an equivalent productive marker, requiring learners to memorize forms.
3. **Idiomatic usage:** Collocational differences (e.g., which verbs commonly combine with each weekday) may create false friends for learners.
4. **Register & synonymy:** In classroom teaching, presenting the transparent Sanskritic variants and their colloquial synonyms (e.g., *Guruvaar*/*Brihaspativaar*) will help learners recognize cultural registers.

Practical pedagogical suggestions include contrastive classroom exercises (mapping calendar items across languages), corpus-driven frequency lists for common collocations, and cultural notes highlighting religious observances tied to particular days.

8. Discussion: convergences, divergences, and historical pathways

The principal convergence is the planetary/deity mapping: in both traditions, weekdays correspond to celestial bodies. This suggests a shared cultural gesturing toward a sevenfold celestial schema common to classical Mediterranean and South Asian astronomical systems. Divergences arise from the mediating cultural and religious histories: Latin and Christianity heavily informed the French lexicon (including substitution of *dominica* for a

[4] https://www.dalvoy.com/en/upsc/mains/previous-years/2025/psychology-paper-i/whorfian-hypothesis-linguistic-relativity

planetary name on Sunday), whereas Sanskritic and Hindu astronomical/astrological systems anchored the Hindi lexicon.

The Names of the Days of the Week: To Each Their Own God. In Western countries, the seven-day week has been officially used for about 1700 years, thanks to the Roman Emperor Constantine I. The names of the days currently used are therefore also directly inspired by Latin, and more specifically by the Roman gods. Each day was an opportunity to celebrate one of the Roman deities, who were associated with one of the celestial bodies that astronomers of the time could observe. Thus, Monday was actually the "day of the Moon" (Lunaes dies), Tuesday the "day of Mars" (martis dies), Wednesday the "day of Mercury" (mercurii dies), Thursday the "day of Jupiter" (jovis dies), and Friday was the "day of Venus" (veneris dies). Saturday and Sunday are slightly different. Saturday comes from sambati dies, the "day of Sabbath" (the Jewish day of rest), and Sunday comes from dies dominicus, the "Lord's Day" (of Christian origin).

However, in other languages, such as English, the Roman origin has remained: Saturday comes from saturni dies, the "day of Saturn," and Sunday is a translation of dies solis, the "day of the Sun." You might wonder how the order of the days of the week was chosen. Well, the first day was dedicated to the celestial body that early astronomers believed to be closest to Earth, that is, the Sun (Sunday was traditionally the first day of the week)... and so on until the farthest celestial body. Though we know that their estimates were wrong. Here's how the week should unfold, according to the actual order of the celestial bodies (from closest to farthest from our planet): Monday (Moon), Friday (Venus), Tuesday (Mars), Wednesday (Mercury), Sunday (Sun), Thursday (Jupiter), and Saturday (Saturn). Come on, admit it, you've often dreamed that Monday would be immediately followed by Friday[5].

Historically, exchange between Hellenistic astronomy and South Asian astronomy (e.g., via Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek contacts, and later through the transmission of astronomical texts) may explain deep structural resemblances in planetary schemata even where lexical items differ. The surface differences—phonology, morphological marking, and religious re-encoding—reflect divergent cultural trajectories rather than a lack of historical contact.

9. Limitations and suggestions for further research

This study is primarily qualitative and descriptive. The following directions would strengthen empirical claims:

- **Corpus analysis:** large-scale corpora of French and Hindi to examine frequency, collocations, and register variation.
- **Historical philology:** deeper archival work on Old French and Prakrit/Apabhramsha stages to map diachronic changes in weekday terms.
- **Ethnographic study:** fieldwork documenting ritual practices associated with specific weekdays across different regions and communities.

[5] https://forestier.ecole.acnormandie.fr/IMG/pdf/les_noms_des_jours_de_la_semaine.pdf

- **Cognitive and psycholinguistic experiments:** testing transparency effects (does *-vaar* improve recall among learners?) and cross-linguistic interference in bilingual speakers.

10. Conclusion

The comparison of French and Hindi weekday nomenclature reveals both striking parallels and informative differences. Both systems index celestial bodies and deities, showing how astronomical and religious schemas shape temporal lexicons. Yet the pathways—Latin-Christian for French, Sanskritic-Hindu for Hindi—produce distinct morphophonological shapes, cultural resonances, and pedagogical challenges. Understanding these differences benefits translation, language teaching, and broader studies of how language encodes time and cultural practice. Similarities are found through secondary sources, as in the Hindi weekday names, the French people also believe that deities are more powerful on the days associated with them.

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