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Tîw i lam Thindrim

Writing Sindarin with Tengwar

A practical guide

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Introduction

This paper is based on an analysis of the scarce material available. The few known preserved Sindarin manuscripts from Middle-earth contain many variations in the spelling. Where variations exist, the simplest, most common form is chosen. Also, because of lack of examples, a few rules are by necessity conjecture. The purpose of this paper is not to list all the variants, but to demonstrate how Tengwar *can* be used to write Sindarin, giving a concise set of rules for practical use. The rules do not, of course, apply at all to any other language such as Quenya, English or Swedish.

Many thanks to the members of the Mellonath Daeron, the language guild of the Stockholm Tolkien Society, and D. Daniel Andriës and for their invaluable comments and suggestions.

General

The Tengwar are used *phonemically*, so there is a close correspondence between how words are pronounced and written with tengwar. The latin transcriptions are also in general phonemic, with some special cases. Also, the sindarin use of the tengwar has some nonintuitive rules. With Tengwar belong *Tehtar*, additional signs, which are used for vowels and other things. The tables at the end show their sound values and how they are used.

Sindarin can be written in two different modes: the *tehta mode* and the *mode of Beleriand*. In the *tehta mode*, vowels are written with a *tehta* above the *tengwa* for the following consonant. In the *mode of Beleriand*, vowels are written with *tengwar*. There are several other differences, note e.g. the interchanged use of columns III and IV for consonants.

Sindarin has six diphthongs: **ae**, **oe**, **ai**, **ei**, **ui**, **au** (transcribed **-aw** at the end of words). Other vowel combinations are not diphthongs, their components are pronounced separately. There are unfortunately no attested examples for the diphthongs **oe** and **au** in *tehta mode* and for **oe** in the *mode of Beleriand*. For these a "best guess" is chosen, based on analogies with how the other diphthongs are written in Sindarin and Quenya.

Rules for the tehta mode

Tehtar for vowels are placed above the tengwa for the following consonant. This is practical, since words in Sindarin often end with a consonant. Example: *nen* "water" is written **ṅṅ**.

When there is no following tengwa (e.g. at the end of a word) the tehta is placed on a mute *vowel carrier*, 1. Example: *pedo* "speak" is written **ṗṗṗ**.

Long vowels, which are transcribed with an acute accent or circumflex, are placed on a separate *long vowel carrier*, 1. Example: *dûn* "west" is written **ḍḍ**.

Long consonants, which are transcribed with a doubled letter, is marked with a wavy line below the tengwa. Example: *mellon* "friend" is written **ṃṃ**.

When a consonant is preceded by its nasal version (including itself), as in **nt**, **nd**, **mp**, **mb**, **nc**, **ng**, **nn**, and **mm**, a line is placed above the tengwa. Examples: *thond* "root" is written **ḥḥ**, *Ennorath* "Middle-earth" is written **ṁṁ**.

The letters **s** and **ss** are written with Silme and Esse. When vowel tehtar are placed above it is often practical to use Silme nuquerna and Esse nuquerna instead. Example: *bess* "wife" is written **ṗṗ**.

The letter **r** is normally written with Rómen, except at the end of words where it is written with Óre. Example: *curunír* "man of skill", "wizard" is written **ṙṙ**.

Diphthongs are written with a tehta for the first vowel placed above a tengwa for the second:

- Yanta (λ) for **ae**, **oe**. Example: *aear* "sea" is written **ṗṗ**.
- Anna (Ϸ) for **ai**, **ei**, **ui**. Example: *eithel* "spring (of water)" is written **ṗṗ**.
- Úre (o) for **au** (-aw). Example: *baw* "don't do it" is written **ṗṗ**.

Initial **i** followed by a vowel is pronounced as a consonantal **y**. A unique feature of this mode is that this sound is written with a single Yanta. Example: *iarwain* "oldest" is written **ṗṗ**.

Rules for the mode of Beleriand

Both consonants and vowels are written with tengwar. Example: *aglareb* "glorious" is written **᠘᠗᠘᠘᠘᠗᠘᠗**. (Note also the difference from tehta mode in the tengwa for **g**!)

Long consonants, which are transcribed with a doubled letter, is normally written with a doubled tengwa. Example: *sell* "daughter" is written **᠘᠗᠘᠘᠗**.

A unique feature of this mode is that **m** and **n** are written with Vala and Óre. Example: *anim* "for myself" is written **᠘᠗᠗᠗**. (Thus, Óre can't be used for **r**, so it is always written with Rómen, **᠕**).

Double **mm** and **nn** are also written in a special way, with Malta and Númen. Examples: *brannon* "lord" is written **᠕᠗᠘᠗᠗᠗᠗**, *rammas* "great wall" is written **᠕᠗᠗᠗᠗**.

Double **ss** is written with Esse. Example: *bess* "wife" is written **᠕᠗᠗᠗**.

Long vowels, which are transcribed with an acute accent or circumflex, are marked with an *andaith* ("long mark"), which looks like an acute accent, ´, above the tengwa. Example: *dûn* "west" is written **᠕᠗᠗᠗**.

When a consonant is preceded by its nasal version, as in **nt**, **nd**, **mp**, **mb**, **nc**, **ng**, a line is placed above the tengwa. Example: *lembas* "waybread" is written **᠘᠗᠗᠗᠗᠗**.

Some diphthongs are written out in full, some with a tehta for the *second* vowel placed above a tengwa for the *first* (note the difference from tehta mode):

- **ae** and **oe** are written out in full. Example: *aeor* "sea" is written **᠘᠗᠗᠗**.
- (¨) for **ai**, **ei**, **ui**. Example: *eithel* "spring (of water)" is written **᠕᠗᠗᠗**.
- (¯) for **au** (-aw). Example: *baw* "don't do it" is written **᠕᠗᠗**.

Common rules for both modes

1. The digraph **ph** is pronounced **f**. It is always written with Formen. Example: *alph* "swan" is written $\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}\text{b}$ or $\text{c}\overset{\cdot}{\text{b}}$.
2. **v** is spelled **f** at the end of words, as in the the english word *of*. It is always written with Ampa. Example: *nef* "on this side" is written nb or nb .
3. The digraphs **th** and **dh** represent **þ** and **ð**, the mute and voiced lisp sounds. They are written with Súle and Ando. Examples: *thoron* "eagle" is written $\text{h}\overset{\cdot}{\text{y}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{o}}$ or $\text{h}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{y}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}$, *galadh* "tree" is written $\text{t}\overset{\cdot}{\text{q}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{a}}$ or $\text{w}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}$. However, the combination **th** may arise in compound words. No lisp sound is then created, both consonants are pronounced separately. Example: *Panthael* (*Pant-hael*) "Full-wise" is written $\text{p}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{a}}$ or $\text{p}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{a}}$.
4. Unvoiced **l** and **r** are written **lh** and **rh** and occur only at the beginning of words. (They can be rather difficult for mortals to pronounce!) They are written with Alda and Arda. Examples: *lhûg* "snake", "dragon" is written $\text{z}\overset{\cdot}{\text{j}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{q}}$ or $\text{z}\overset{\cdot}{\text{o}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}$, *rhûn* "east" is written $\text{y}\overset{\cdot}{\text{j}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}$ or $\text{y}\overset{\cdot}{\text{o}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}$. In other cases the combinations **lh** and **rh** are pronounced and written normally. Example: *edhelhîr* "elf-lord" is written $\text{h}\overset{\cdot}{\text{a}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{t}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{y}}$ or $\text{h}\overset{\cdot}{\text{a}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{y}}$.
5. The **ng** sound is pronounced with **g**, as in the english word *finger*. It is consequently written with the tengwa for **g**. Example: *ungol* "spider" is written $\text{t}\overset{\cdot}{\text{q}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}$ or $\text{o}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{y}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}$. But at the beginning and end of words **ng** is pronounced as a single sound, as in the english word *sing*. Then Nwalme or Noldo is used, depending on mode. Example: *fang* "beard" is written $\text{b}\overset{\cdot}{\text{a}}$ or $\text{b}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}$.
6. The digraphs **gw** and **dw** (labialized **g** and **d**) are written with a 'backwards twist' over the tengwa for **g** or **d**. Examples: *gwain* "new" is written $\text{t}\overset{\cdot}{\text{q}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}$ or $\text{w}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}$, *edwen* "second" is written $\text{r}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{a}}$ or $\text{r}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{a}}$.
7. A special case is **ngw**, which is written as a nasalized **gw**. Example: *angwedh* (*ang-gwedh*) "chain" is pronounced with an **ng** sound, but is written $\text{t}\overset{\cdot}{\text{q}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}$ or $\text{c}\overset{\cdot}{\text{w}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}$.
8. In the third age, **oe** is always a diphthong. But in archaic Sindarin **oe** represented both the diphtong and also the o-umlaut sound **œ** (Danish **ø**, Swedish and German **ö**). Example: *arnoediad* "countless" was in the third age spelled and pronounced *arnediad*, $\text{y}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{a}}$ or $\text{c}\overset{\cdot}{\text{y}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{r}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{a}}$.

Notes

Hyphenated words (in transcriptions) are written as one word with tengwar. The same goes for apostrophes, which have no correspondance in tengwar.

The tengwar for **a** and **i** in the mode of Beleriand can sometimes in calligraphic script be difficult to distinguish from the following tengwa. In such cases, a dot can be written above. Example: *na-chared* "to remote distance" can be written $\text{n}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{d}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{c}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{h}}\overset{\cdot}{\text{a}}$.

Sindarin - tehta mode

Consonants

1 Tinco ƿ t	2 Parma ƿ p	3 Calma ç -	4 Qesse ç c
5 Ando ƿ̅ d	6 Umbar ƿ̅ b	7 Anga çç -	8 Ungwe çç g
9 Súle h th	10 Formen h f, ph	11 Aha ç -	12 Hwesta ç ch
13 Anto h̅ dh	14 Ampa h̅ v, -f	15 Anca çç -	16 Unque çç -
17 Númen n n	18 Malta m m	19 Noldo çç -	20 Nwalme çç -ng
21 Óre r -r	22 Vala w w	23 Anna ç -	24 Wilya ç -
25 Rómen r r	26 Arda rh rh	27 Lambe l l	28 Alda lh lh
29 Silme s s	30 S. Nuquerna s s	31 Esse ss ss	32 E. Nuquerna ss ss
33 Hyarmen h h	34 Hw. Sindarinwa ç -	35 Yanta ç i-	36 Úre ç -

Vowels

á a	é e	í i	ó o	ú u	ý y
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Diphthongs

æ ae	œ oe	ai ai	ei ei	ui ui	au, -aw au, -aw
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Labializations

gw gw	dw dw
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Special characters

Comma ·	colon :	Period ∴	Exclamation mark !	Question mark ?
Vowel carrier j	Long vowel carrier J			

Sindarin - mode of Beleriand

Consonants and vowels

1 Tinco ƿ t	2 Parma ƿ p	3 Calma ç c	4 Qesse q -
5 Ando ƿ̅ d	6 Umbar ƿ̅ b	7 Anga çç g	8 Ungwe çç -
9 Súle h th	10 Formen h f, ph	11 Aha ç ch	12 Hwesta d -
13 Anto h̅ dh	14 Ampa h̅ v, -f	15 Anca çç -	16 Unque çç -
17 Númen h̅ nn	18 Malta h̅ mm	19 Noldo çç -ng	20 Nwalme çç -
21 Óre n n	22 Vala m m	23 Anna o o	24 Wilya w w
25 Rómen r r	26 Arda rh rh	27 Lambe l l	28 Alda lh lh
29 Silme s s	30 S. Nuquerna y y	31 Esse ss ss	32 E. Nuquerna - -
33 Hyarmen h h	34 Hw. Sindarinwa - -	35 Yanta e e	36 Úre u u
A-tengwa c a	I-tengwa j i		

Diphthongs

ê ae	é oe	ë ai	ë ei	ö ui	ē au,-aw
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Labializations

çç gw	ƿ̅ dw
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Special characters

Andaith ´	Comma ·	colon :	Period ∴	Exclamation mark !	Question mark ?
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