



Cuio Edhellen!

An Introduction to the Sindarin Language of Middle-Earth

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This book is typeset in Iowan Old Style. *Tengwar* text uses the Tengwar Annatar font developed by Johan Winge. This part of a book is called a colophon!

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Mae govannen! • Well met!

This book is about Sindarin, an Elvish language invented by J.R.R. Tolkien as part of his fictional world of Middle-earth. Actually, to say that Sindarin comes from Middle-earth is a bit backwards; Tolkien was inventing Elvish languages long before he ever dreamed up *hobbits* or the Ring or any of the rest of it. It would be closer to the truth to say that Middle-earth comes from Sindarin, for the Elvish languages were the real inspiration for all the rest of Tolkien's legendarium. As Tolkien himself wrote in a letter to his publisher,

The invention of languages is the foundation. The "stories" were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse. To me a name comes first and the story follows. I should have preferred to write in "Elvish".

Language was Tolkien's first love, and he considered the invention of language to be inseparable from his writing. After all, what is a story without a language that can tell it? And what is a language without a story to tell?

And what is either one, without people who remember it?

*A Elbereth! Gilthoniel!
Mí epholar sí, derthiel
Vi ndorath hin geledhui,
Gilgalad gaeryn ennui.*

*We still remember, we who dwell
In these far lands beneath the trees
Thy starlight on the western seas.*

Why study Sindarin?

The *Lord of the Rings* is aglitter with Sindarin names and phrases: *Caras Galadhon*, *Amon Amarth*, *Mínas Tirith*, *Galadriel*. You can appreciate these words for their sound alone, but knowing a bit of Elvish will reveal the incredible depth of the stories behind them, depth that can only be vaguely glimpsed by those who aren't yet acquainted with the language.

But perhaps a more immediately compelling reason is that Sindarin is simply beautiful. Tolkien delighted in “the moment of association between sound and sense” and his words have the feel of having been polished by a master craftsman: they *sound* like what they mean. Tolkien describes the peculiar feeling of inventing the word *lint* in childhood, with the meaning “quick”, and how he was struck by the way the sound seemed to fit the meaning. (The word survives, slightly modified, in Sindarin: *lim*.) His keen sense of the music of words is evident everywhere in Sindarin.

Learning Sindarin will also help you learn other languages. Sindarin’s grammar is inspired by European languages, so if you’re trying to learn a language like Spanish, French, or German, Sindarin is a good stepping stone. Even if you don’t follow up your Sindarin studies with a foreign language course, you may find yourself delighting in the subtleties of your native tongue—and wielding it with greater confidence.

Of course, you probably want to actually *use* Sindarin for something. Sindarin phrases can certainly lend an Elvish flavor to roleplaying campaigns or Tolkien fanfiction. If you study very hard, you might even be able to keep a journal in Sindarin (though the language naturally lacks the vocabulary for modern inventions like cars and phones). And of course, you can write poetry, and enjoy the poetry of others, which you can find in abundance on the Web.

About this book

This textbook is designed as an introductory course in the Sindarin language. The lessons progress gradually from easy topics to more complex ones, but at the end of each lesson you will have learned a small piece of the language that you can immediately start using. There are fill-in-the-blank exercises at the end of each lesson so you can test yourself and practice using the language.

The course assumes no previous experience with foreign languages, although a little knowledge of English grammar won’t hurt, and if you *have* studied a foreign language, that’s better still. At a minimum, you should be acquainted with terms like **NOUN**, **VERB**, **FIRST PERSON**, and **PAST TENSE**, or be ready to look them up!

The book is divided into four parts: an introduction, two groups of lessons, and a reference section.

The **Introduction** orients Sindarin within Tolkien's life and legendarium, covers the basics of Sindarin pronunciation, and introduces some useful phrases and vocabulary. Read this part first before moving on to the lessons.

Writing Systems teaches the basics of the Elvish alphabet *tengwar*. You won't need this information for the Grammar lessons in the next section, so you can skip it if you wish.

Sindarin Grammar describes the rules for putting words together into sentences. In this section, you'll learn to read, write, and speak the language.

The **Reference** section compiles all the grammar rules introduced in the lessons, for when you've mastered the basics of the language but still need to look things up occasionally.

One big asterisk

Now, before you run off and buy your ticket to Middle-earth, I need to burst your bubble a tiny bit. The truth is... you can't *really* learn to speak Elvish—at least not in the way you might be imagining.

One problem with learning the Elvish languages is that Tolkien never intended them to be used by anyone other than the characters in his books, so he never wrote any reader-friendly dictionaries or grammar lessons. He also changed his mind repeatedly about various details of his languages, and his notes often contradict each other. This makes it very difficult to know whether our Sindarin compositions resemble anything Tolkien himself might have written.

Because of this inherent uncertainty, speaking Sindarin is a bit like drawing a dinosaur. We might never know for sure what color T-Rex was, but if you're going to draw one, you have to make it *some* color—so you just choose one that seems plausible and make a mental note that you might be wrong.

Similarly, we can never really know what Tolkien had in mind when creating his languages, so when it's not clear how to translate something the normal course of action is to just choose a plausible option and forge ahead. Unfortunately, while some translations are likelier than others, not everyone agrees on the *same* translation. That means that even if you memorize this book cover to cover, you might find it hard to communicate with other people in Sindarin, especially if they learned from a different source.

There is no need to despair, however. In time you may come to see the limitations of Sindarin as a strength rather than a weakness.

When something is hard to phrase in Sindarin it's sometimes because it simply doesn't fit into Tolkien's world, but if you learn to cut away the indirection of modern speech you can often phrase your meaning in a surprisingly Elvish way. You could reword a sentence like "My computer's been acting strange recently" to "My writing-*palantír* may be dying. I am afraid." *I balannir-e-deithad nîn ce firiél. Thoss tôl anim.* Sindarin forces you to simplify your words and say what you really mean—a valuable skill no matter what language you write in.

Despite these constraints, the aim of this book remains ambitious. I have tried to present a "complete" and faithful rendition of Sindarin—always keeping in mind, of course, that such a "completed" language should not be treated as authoritative or set in stone. Indeed, I have left some parts of the book deliberately vague, because I feel that a precise and formal description of Sindarin would go against the spirit of the language. When considering details like word order, or whether a certain sound-shift should apply, the ear and heart are a better guide than any rule.

Therefore, do not worry too much about any uncertainties you encounter as you read through this book. Though it might be impossible to make Sindarin your second language, it can be much more than that. Just keep coming back; revisit it as you would an old friend, and soon you will come to know its habits as your own. Sindarin can be a home away from home, another mode of thinking and being: dwell in it, and it will grow around you like a forest.

Reconstructed Words

When we can't find the words to translate something into Sindarin, often our only option is to *reconstruct* a word based on one of Tolkien's other languages.

Tolkien's Elvish tongues, which include Sindarin and Quenya, are all related in a family tree. At the beginning of Middle-earth's history all the Elves spoke one language: Primitive Quendian. As different groups of Elves spread across the land and formed isolated bands, their languages gradually changed and drifted apart from one another. Sindarin and Quenya are two such languages—they are siblings in the family tree, with Primitive Quendian as their parent.

In both Sindarin and Quenya, the way that words and sounds changed over the years followed regular patterns. This means that for any

Primitive Quendian word, we can apply some sound change rules and peer into the word's future, working out what it would later become in Sindarin or Quenya. The same process works in reverse—by applying sound change rules backwards, we can find the Primitive Quendian ancestor of a Sindarin or Quenya word.

Reconstructing a Sindarin word usually involves tracing a Quenya word back through history to find its Primitive Quendian ancestor, and then walking the sound changes forward to find out what the word would have become in Sindarin.

For example, let's imagine that we didn't know the Sindarin word for "beautiful" and wanted to reconstruct it. In Quenya, "beautiful" is *vanya*. We can trace this back to Primitive Quendian and discover that the ancient form of the word is *banjā*. From there, we just have to follow the Sindarin sound changes to figure out that Sindarin for "beautiful" is *bain*.

That is how reconstruction works in the best case, but often it's more complicated. We don't always know if Tolkien intended for a Primitive Quendian word to survive in Sindarin—maybe he imagined that the Sindarin-speaking Elves replaced it with a different word. Sometimes reconstruction produces a form that's identical to an existing Sindarin word, so we can't use it without creating ambiguity. Sometimes it's not clear exactly how the sounds should change. Even when it is clear, we're left wondering if Tolkien himself would have used the word, or if he would have thrown it out and invented a different one.

Reconstruction is therefore always a stab in the dark: a last-resort means of doing a translation when there is simply no better option.

It is good to be aware of which words are reconstructed and which are Tolkien's, because not everyone will understand or approve of a given reconstructed word. I've followed the convention of other writers and marked reconstructed words with an asterisk (*).

Movie Sindarin

When the *Lord of the Rings* films came out, it seemed like *everyone* was learning Elvish. Many courses and websites were written to teach the languages spoken in the movies.

In the years that followed, more of Tolkien's unpublished notes came to light, and some of them proved that a lot of words and grammar used in the movies were inaccurate. For instance, movie phrases such as *le*

hannon (“thank you”) and *hennaid* (“thanks”), are now widely regarded as incorrect (or at least unsupported by evidence from Tolkien’s own writings). Nevertheless, you can still find Tolkien fans on the Web using *le hannon* to mean “thank you”, because there is simply no better alternative.

The upshot of all of this is that learning proper Tolkien-Sindarin is not sufficient to understand the dialogue in the *Lord of the Rings* movies, much less the living Sindarin language spoken on the Web. And these versions of the language cannot be dismissed lightly; I expect my readers will be nearly as interested in them as in Tolkien-canon.

For that reason, I’ve included the movies’ idiosyncratic words in this book and marked them with a dagger (†).

Typographical Conventions

As mentioned earlier, an asterisk (*) before a Sindarin word means the word is reconstructed. A dagger (†) marks dubious reconstructions used in the *Lord of the Rings* movies.

All Sindarin text is in ***bold italics***. Words from other Elvish languages (mostly Quenya) are simply *italicized*.

I have tried to keep the technical jargon in this textbook to a minimum, but sometimes I have to use a linguistics term for the sake of precision. The first use of a term is in **SMALL CAPITALS**. If you aren’t familiar with a term, do a web search for it; you’ll find many grammar sites that are aimed at beginners and use comprehensible language.

INTRODUCTION

A Taste of Elvish

Tolkien delighted in “tasting” languages. It was his way of exploring the beauty of a language without needing to learn all the fiddly grammar rules. He wrote:

Gothic was the first [language] to take me by storm, to move my heart. [. . .] I have since mourned the loss of Gothic literature. I did not then. The contemplation of the vocabulary in *A Primer of the Gothic Language* was enough [. . .] I tried to invent Gothic words.

I have, in this peculiar sense, studied (“tasted” would be better) other languages since. Of all save one among them the most overwhelming pleasure was provided by Finnish, and I have never quite got over it.

—J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics* p. 192

This chapter endeavors to give you a “taste” of Sindarin—to whet your appetite for the language and give you a sense of what Sindarin is all about.

A Brief History of Elvish Languages

The first Elves awoke before there was a Sun or a Moon. They found themselves by the shores of a great lake, which in the Quenya language of later days was called *Cuiviénen*, the Water of Awakening. The first word they spoke, according to later Elven lore, was *ele!*—an exclamation of wonder and delight that they uttered upon first seeing the stars. They called themselves *kwendī*, meaning “those who speak”, since they knew of no other beings that could use language.

When the Vala Arômëz (often called *Oromë*) met the Elves and told them of Aman, the abode of the Valar beyond the sea, some Elves wished to go there and some were afraid to make the journey. Those who refused the journey were called *abarī* (“refusers”). They were lost in the wilds of Middle-earth and play small part in its later history. Those who heeded Oromë and marched across Middle-earth to the shores of the

Great Sea were called *edeloī* (“travelers”). The Quenya word *eldar* is a descendant of this term, as is the Sindarin *edhil*. Both words came to mean simply “elves”.

During the journey toward the Sea, the *eldar* were sundered yet again. The Vanyar and Noldor clans, who arrived at the shore first, hastened across the Sea to Aman. Those who tarried behind, the Teleri, waited at the shore, torn between their love for Middle-earth and their desire to cross the sea. Before they could begin the sea voyage, their leader, Elwë, crossed the path of Melian, a Maia. He fell at once in love with her and for many years they remained under an enchantment in the forest of Nan Elmoth. The other Teleri could not find him, and many refused to cross the Sea without their lord. And so they remained in Middle-earth.

Two hundred years later, Elwë reappeared, and with Melian as his queen reassumed rulership of the Teleri. As the long, sunless years passed and the Teleri and Noldor remained apart, their speech gradually changed. The language of the Noldor became the speech known in the Third Age as Quenya, while the Teleri came to speak a language that had as yet no name, for since their separation from the Noldor they heard no speech except their own and needed no word to distinguish it. If they had occasion to refer to their language, they would likely have called it *edhellen* (“Elvish”).

But *edhellen* was not fated to dwell alone in the forests forever. The Noldor returned to Middle-earth, and it was with blood on their hands—they had taken ships by force from the Teleri who had traveled to Aman, and killed many of them in the process. When Elwë learned that the Noldor had slain his kindred, he banned their language Quenya from his realm. The language of Elwë became the language of all the *eldar* of Middle-earth, but its contact with the Noldor left its mark, and ever after the language bore a Quenya name: *Sindarin*, or “Grey-elven”.

In Frodo’s day the Elves west of the Misty Mountains still spoke Sindarin, and in their houses it could often be heard as they lifted their voices in song:

*A! Elbereth, Gilthoniel!
Mi ’aladhremmin derthiel
Chae ennorath, si †renim ui
Gîl lîn or ’Aear Annui.*

(O Elbereth Starkindler,
Having dwelt far away in tree-woven

Middle-earth, we still recall forever
Thy stars above the Western Sea.)

Features of Sindarin

Sindarin is an earthy language, akin to but unlike its sibling Quenya. While Quenya flourished in Aman, the abode of the angelic Valar, Sindarin was confined to the forests and caves of Middle-earth. Its recompense was an understanding, woven into its words, of the significance of earthly things like mountains and trees, and also of their finiteness and ultimate mortality. The changefulness of Sindarin echoes the change of mortal lands.

This “changefulness” deserves further description, because it is one of the things that makes Sindarin so fascinating and challenging to study. Basically, a word in Sindarin can wear many disguises, changing its form in a kaleidoscope of ways. Take, for example, the phrase “the letter”: in Sindarin this would be *i dêw*. To form the plural, English simply adds an *-s*: “the letters”. But in Sindarin, the plural form changes completely: “the letters” would be *i thîw*! So if you saw these phrases in a Sindarin text and wanted to look up the word, where in the dictionary should you look? Under *dêw* or *thîw*? It turns out that this is a trick question, because *both* of these forms are “mutated” versions of the basic word *têw*—which is what an Elf would likely say if you asked “how do you say ‘letter’ in Sindarin?”

This system of *consonant mutations* is one of Sindarin’s most iconic features. Mutations are grammatical rules that change the first letter of a word under certain conditions.

Cîr tollen ammen “Ships have come for us”
ach ú-aníron gîr “but I do not desire ships”
i ven i chîr hollen anim “the path of the ships is closed to me”

In the example above, you’ll notice that the word for “ships” is variously rendered *cîr*, *gîr*, and *chîr*. The rules of consonant mutations tell you when to use each spelling.

The plural form of nouns is marked by internal changes in the noun itself, rather than by a suffix (like the English plural suffix *-s*). For example, the plural of *adan* “human” is *edain* “humans”; the plural of *aran* “king” is *erain*.

Quenya and Sindarin

Within Tolkien's legendarium, Sindarin contrasts primarily with the High-Elven language Quenya. Although Tolkien imagined over a dozen languages to fill out every corner of Middle-earth, it was to these two that he dedicated most of his artistic energy. While the other languages have only a smattering of vocabulary, Sindarin and Quenya have thousands of words each.

For this reason, when you encounter an Elvish name or phrase in Tolkien's works, it is almost certain to be either Sindarin or Quenya. However, Tolkien generally doesn't specify which language he's using when he introduces an Elvish phrase. Therefore, the first lesson every student of Elvish must learn is how to tell these two languages apart. They have very different grammars and rules for word formation, so if you mix them up, you'll end up very confused!

Fortunately for us, Sindarin and Quenya look different enough that it's easy to learn to tell them apart. Here are some Sindarin words with their Quenya and English translations:

Sindarin	Quenya	English
<i>alph</i>	<i>alqua</i>	swan
<i>edain</i>	<i>atani</i>	humans
<i>edhel</i>	<i>elda</i>	elf
<i>êl</i>	<i>elen</i>	star
<i>celeb</i>	<i>tyelpë</i>	silver
<i>gond</i>	<i>ondo</i>	stone
<i>lass</i>	<i>lassë</i>	leaf
<i>glaur</i>	<i>laurë</i>	gold
<i>dant</i>	<i>lantie</i>	a fall
<i>pant</i>	<i>quanta</i>	full
<i>rhîw</i>	<i>hrivë</i>	winter
<i>echuir</i>	<i>coirë</i>	early spring (season)
<i>dû</i>	<i>ló</i>	night

Just from that list, you might be starting to get a sense of the flavor of each language. But if you prefer to rules to vague feelings—here are some rules you can use to tell the languages apart:

- Though it's not a hard-and-fast rule, Quenya words tend to end with a vowel (A, E, I, O, or U), while Sindarin words tend to end with a consonant.
- If you see an E with two dots over, (ë), you can be 100% certain the word is Quenya.
- If you see a circumflex accent (e.g. â), you can be 100% certain the word is Sindarin. (Assuming it's Elvish at all; a few of Tolkien's non-Elvish languages use the circumflex, notably the Númenórean language Adunaic, the "Common Speech" Westron, the Black Speech of Mordor, and Valarin, the language of the Valar).
- If the word begins with *D*, *B*, or *G*, it's Sindarin. Quenya uses these letters, but only in the middle of words.
- If you see *TH*, *DH*, or *PH*, it's Sindarin.
- If you see the letters *Q* or *X*, the word is Quenya.

A Sindarin Phrasebook

The best way to start learning Sindarin is to just learn some phrases and get a feel for how the language sounds. If you look for patterns in the phrases that follow, you can pick up few useful words, and you might learn a bit of grammar too!

Of course, as you're sounding out these phrases it helps to know how they're supposed to be pronounced. If you pronounce the vowels *a e i o u* as in Spanish or Italian you won't go far wrong. The letter *y* sounds like *ee* but with your lips tight as if saying *oo*. Sindarin *ch* is like the sound in Scottish *loch*. The letter *c* by itself is always hard, like a K.

An Adventure in Elven Lands

You greet your halfling traveling companions

Mae govannen!

“Well met!”

Êl síla na lû govaned 'wín

“A star shines on the hour of our meeting”

You stop by the pub to ask for directions

Togo aes ammen, cí athol

“Bring us food, please”

Na van i mar Elrond?

“Where is the house of Elrond?”

Man i ven na Imladris?

“Which way to Rivendell?”

You take your leave of the innkeeper

Novaer!

“Farewell!”

No galu na mar lín

“May good fortune be upon your house”

†***Hennaid***

“Thanks”

You admire your surroundings

Tiro Ithil!

“Look at the moon!”

Edrar i ñgîl

“The stars are coming out”

I dawar hen bain

“The forest here is beautiful”

You run into trouble

Yngyl!

“Spiders!”

Drego!

“Run away!”

Ai!

“Oh no!”

You are rescued by a band of elven hunters

Edraith ammen!

“Save us!”

Northo in yngyl!

“Pursue the spiders!”

Dago hain!

“Kill them!”

Berio i pheriain!

“Protect the halflings!”

You thank them

† ***Rim hennaïd***

“Many thanks”

† ***Le hannon***

“I thank you”

They are amused, and offer to lead you to Rivendell

† ***Ú-moe hennaïd***

“No thanks are necessary”

Maer hennui i edhellen lín!

“Your Elvish is pretty good!”

Aphado vin na Imladris

“Follow us to Rivendell”

On the way, you flirt with a particularly attractive member of the Elvish party

Suilad!

“Hello!”

____ ***i eneth nín***

“My name is ____”

Man i eneth lín?

“What is your name?”

Melin le

† ***Melon le***

“I like you”

Melig nín?

†***Melach nín?***

“Do you like me?”

But alas, it is not to be

No gwen mellyn erui

“Let's just be friends”

Nae!

“Alas!”

Be iest lín

“As you wish”

When you get to Rivendell, there is a party going on

Tolo, mado go vin!

“Come, dine with us!”

Panno ylf e-rendir!

“Fill the wanderers' cups!”

Leithio i naeth lín!

“Let go your cares!”

Ammaer i miruvor hen

“This *miruvor* (a type of wine) is excellent”

Linno i 'laer e-dant Morgoth!

“Sing the song of Morgoth's fall!”

Ista pen linnod maer?

“Anyone know a good *linnod* (type of short poem)?”

You step outside to get some fresh air

Tiro! Ithil ortha.

“Look! The moon is rising.”

Lastog in edhil linno?

†*Lastach in edhil linno?*

“Do you hear the elves singing?”

The festivities wind down and you turn in for the night

Losto vae

“Sleep well”

The next morning, you say farewell to your new friends

Cuio vae!

“Live well”

Calo Anor na ven lín

“May the sun shine on your road”

N’adovaned

“Until we meet again”

Selected Vocabulary

This is just a short selection of the most common Sindarin words. A comprehensive dictionary would take a book of its own, but fortunately for me I don't have to write one, since there are several good Sindarin wordlists available online. You can find links to them at the URL below:

menegroth.github.io/links.html

Pronunciation

Pronounce the vowels as if they're Spanish or Italian. **Y** is pronounced as in *Yvonne* or *icy* or like *ü* in German *über*. Most of these words happen to be stressed on the first syllable, though that's not the general rule in Sindarin. You can find a more complete pronunciation guide on page 32.

People

Adan “Man”, especially one of the Elf-friends of the houses of Bëor, Haleth, and Marach. Plural **Edain**. See *Letters* #211, p. 282.

edhel “elf”, plural **edhil**.

ellon “Elf-man”, i.e. a male elf.

elleth “elf-woman”

Onod “Ent”, plural **Enyd**

Ithron “Wizard”, plural **Ithryn**

mellon “friend”, pl. **mellyn**

perian “hobbit”, plural **periaian**

naug “dwarf”, pl. **noeg**

naugrim “dwarf-folk”

thalion “hero”, pl. **thelyn**

Places

orod “mountain”, pl. **eryd**

amon “hill”, pl. **emyn**

taur “forest”

rath “street, riverbed”

Amon Amarth “Mount Doom”

Imladris “Rivendell”

Minas Tirith “Tower of the Guard”

Minas Morgul “Tower of Sorcery”

Barad-dûr “Dark Tower”, Sauron’s stronghold

bar “land, home”, pl. *bair*

parth “field, enclosed grassland, sward”, pl. possibly *perth*

gaear “sea”, also *gaearon* “great sea”

Things

lembas “waybread”

nen “water”

corf “ring” (*f* has a *V*-sound at the end of a word)

parf “book”

têw “letter”, pl. *tîw*

peth “word”, pl. *pith*

Ithil “the Moon”

Anor “the Sun”. See the Index to *LotR*, Section IV “Things”.

galadh “tree”

orn “tree”

gil “star”

Adjectives

Sindarin adjectives usually come *after* the noun they modify—the opposite of English. Adjectives often have a distinct plural form, which must be used when the noun is plural: *parth galen* “green field” vs. *perth gelin* “green fields”

aer “holy”

agarwaen “bloodstained”

alag “rushing, impetuous”

alfirin “immortal”

and “long”

angren “made of iron”, pl. *engrin*

aglareb “glorious”, pl. possibly *eglerib*

annui “western”

arnediad “innumerable, countless, endless” (stressed on the second syllable: **arnediad**)

beleg “great, mighty” (often mutated to **veleg** after a noun)

bronadui “enduring, lasting”

calen “green”, pl. **celin** (often mutated to **galen**, **gelin** after a noun)

fanui “cloudy”

fireb “mortal”, pl. **firib**

iaur “ancient, old, original”

Verbs

N.B.: All of these verbs are given in their *imperative* or “command” form—so they work for telling someone to do something, but not for describing what they did. For more verb forms, you’ll have to read the upcoming chapters!

Noro! “Run!”

Daro! “Halt!”

Linno! “Sing!”

Mado! “Eat!”

Minno! “Enter!”

Pedo! “Speak!”

Miscellaneous

a “and”

i “the”, but only before singular nouns beginning in **F**, **L**, **N**, **TH**, **W**, or a vowel. For other words, there’s some extra grammar you need to know.

in “the”, used for plural nouns beginning in a vowel: **in edhil** “the elves”, **in eryd** “the mountains”.

Ai! “Alas!” or “Oh no!”

Pronunciation Guide

It's hard to learn pronunciation from a book—an audio recording is worth a thousand words of print. This chapter will give you the basics, but you should also check out the online resources. These include recordings of Tolkien pronouncing Sindarin words from *The Lord of the Rings*—naturally the ultimate source for learning to say them correctly yourself. You can find a list of links at menegroth.github.io/links.html.

Of course, the truly authoritative source for Sindarin pronunciation is Appendix E of *The Lord of the Rings*, upon which much of the material here is based.

The Sounds of Sindarin

Tolkien's languages have many imitators in fantasy literature, probably because they balance nicely between familiar and exotic. If you pronounce Sindarin like Latin or Greek you won't be far off. Still, Tolkien uses some sounds and spellings that differ enough from English to deserve mention, and these are discussed in detail below. The good news is that Sindarin's spelling is *phonetic*, so if you know how a word is pronounced, you can figure out how to spell it with 100% accuracy.

Consonants

CONSONANTS are the sounds of language that involve blocking the air flowing through your mouth, creating popping, hissing, or buzzing sounds. This is in contrast to **VOWELS**, which allow air to flow freely. In English, we're used to thinking of all letters except A, E, I, O, and U as consonants.

Most Sindarin consonants are pronounced as you'd expect. There are a few sounds with unintuitive spellings, though, and Sindarin even has some sounds that don't occur in English at all. The sounds and spellings that deviate from English are described below.

C and **G** are always hard, as in *cat* and *get*. *Celeborn* is pronounced "Keleborn".

CH is the sound in German *Bach*. If this sound gives you trouble, you could pronounce it **H** or **K**, as the Gondorians did. In the Gondor

dialect the place-name **Rochann** was pronounced **Rohan**—hence the spelling used in *LotR*.

R is tapped or trilled, as in Spanish.

TH and **DH** are the sounds of *thin* and *this*, respectively. The difference is that when you say *this* your vocal cords are vibrating—put a finger on your throat and you can feel the difference.

LH and **RH** are like **L** and **R** pronounced **VOICELESSLY**—that is, with no vocal cord vibration. These sounds are lifted straight from Welsh, where they're spelled **LL** and **RH**: *Llewellyn*, *Rhiannon*.

HW is similarly a voiceless version of **W**. This is the **WH**-sound in *whale*, in varieties of English that pronounce it differently from *wail*.

S is *always* voiceless—it never has a **Z**-sound, even at the end of a word. The last syllable of **Fanuilos** “Everwhite” sounds like *loss*.

NG, between vowels, is pronounced with a hard **G** as in *finger*. elsewhere, it's pronounced as in *ring*.

Vowels

The vowel letters **A**, **E**, **I**, **O**, and **U** correspond one-to-one with the vowel sounds “ah”, “eh”, “ee”, “oh”, “oo”. Tolkien was aiming for familiarity here: Spanish, Italian, and many other languages have similar vowel systems.

Even English, for all its crazy spelling, sometimes uses the five vowels with their Sindarin pronunciations:

A: “father”

E: “well”

I: “machine”

O: “for”

U: “brute”

With those examples in mind, try pronouncing these words:

ungol “spider”

lembas “waybread”

Legolas “Greenleaf”

Osgiliath “Citadel of the Stars”

In addition to the five main vowels, Sindarin has a sixth vowel **Y** with no equivalent in English. It's the sound of *u* in French *lune*, or *ü* in German *über*. To pronounce it, say “ee” but with your lips rounded as if saying “oo”.

If those instructions sound nonsensical, it's because “ee” usually stretches your lips into a smile, basically the opposite of “oo”. (That's why people say “cheese” for photos!) However, the other important feature of “ee” is that your tongue is pushed forward when saying it, nearly touching your upper teeth. So combine that tongue position with lip-rounding and you have the Sindarin *Y* sound.

In Gondor, *Y* was often pronounced the same as *I*—the Gondorians found this sound as troublesome as we do.

Accents and Vowel Length

An acute accent (*á é í ó ú ý*) indicates that the vowel is held for a slightly longer duration. So in a word like *míriel* “sparkling like jewels”, the first syllable *mí* is held about twice as long as the second syllable *ri*.

A circumflex (*â ê î ô û ŷ*) also indicates a long vowel, but is mostly used in words of one syllable. This may just be an aesthetic whim of Tolkien's, though he justified it by saying that vowels with the circumflex should be held *even longer*. However, the Elvish writing systems only distinguish two vowel lengths, long and short, so the Elves must not have considered this detail very important.

Diphthongs

A diphthong (pronounced DIFF-thong, from the Greek for “two sounds”) is a combination of two vowel sounds that blur together into a single syllable. Diphthongs appear frequently in English, like the “ou” in “house” that starts with an “ah” sound and ends with an “oo” sound. Sindarin has a similar diphthong, spelled *au*.

Here is the complete list of Sindarin diphthongs:

AI: as in “aisle”

AE: no English equivalent. *AE* is a glide from an *A* into an *E*. The resulting sound should be similar to *AI*; Tolkien even suggested pronouncing *AE* the same as *AI* if you're not picky. Or you could aim for a Mirkwood accent and pronounce it like *E*: compare Mirkwood *Legolas* to Classical Sindarin *Laegolas*.

AU: like *ou* in “house”.

EI: as in “weigh”

OE: like *oy* in “boy”, but ending in an “eh” sound.

UI: as in *ruin*, but ending in an “ee” sound rather than the “ih” sound. Tolkien noted that this was a “long diphthong” and scanned as two

syllables in poetry: hence *Fanuilos, le linnathon* in the Hymn to Elbereth, where the meter requires eight syllables per line.

Special Cases

At the end of a word:

V: The **V**-sound is spelled **F** at the end of a word: *nef* “on this side of” is pronounced as *nev* in *never*. When the **F**-sound occurs at the end of a word, it’s spelled **PH**, as in *alph* “swan”. This quirk of spelling probably hearkens back to Tolkien’s fondness for Welsh, where **F** has a **V**-sound.

AU is spelled **AW** word-finally: *caw* “top” sounds very similar to *cow*.

W can occur word-finally, which can be troublesome for English-speakers. To pronounce *têw* “letter”, try saying “teh win” but stop at the *w*. In any case, *têw* should never be pronounced as if it rhymes with *new*.

At the beginning of a word

IA, IAU, IE, IO, IUI: When these combinations appear word-initially, the **I** sounds like the *y* in *yes*. So *ionnath* “sons” and *Ioreth* “Old Woman” begin with a *yo* sound.

ND, MB, NG: These clusters can occur at the beginning of a word. Pronouncing these sounds is arguably the most challenging aspect of Sindarin pronunciation for English speakers, though it can certainly be mastered with practice. You may be happy to know that these word-initial clusters only arise due to mutations and therefore almost always follow a vowel, as in *i mbair* “the lands”. This makes things somewhat easier; if you say *im bair* probably no one will notice.

To complicate matters, the spelling **NG** is actually ambiguous at the beginning of a word. Sometimes it represents a single, unitary sound, the *ng* in *ring*, while at other times it represents that sound plus *g*, as in *finger*. Each sound arises from a different type of mutation. At this point, you don’t have to worry about the distinction—pronouncing either of these sounds correctly is hard enough for a first lesson!

Long Consonants

In addition to having long and short vowels, Sindarin makes a contrast between long and short consonants. English also has this contrast in

a few cases: *unaimed* has a short *n*, while *unnamed* (if you're trying to pronounce it differently from *unaimed*) has a long *n*.

In Sindarin spelling, a doubled letter means the consonant is long. For example, *†melon* “I love” has a short *L*, while *mellon* “friend” has a long *L*.

PH is a tricky exception: at the beginning or end of a word it's a short *F*-sound, pronounced as in *photograph*. However, in the middle of a word, it's long: *ephel* “outer fence” is pronounced *ef-fel*.

Spelling Ambiguities

The modern English alphabet simply doesn't have enough letters to represent Sindarin unambiguously. In compound words especially, confusion can arise.

The combinations **DH**, **LH**, **RH**, **TH** sometimes represent a sequence of two distinct sounds, e.g. **T+H**. For example, *Panthael* (“Fullwise”, a name given to Sam Gamgee by Aragorn), is a compound *pant+hael*, so the *t* and *h* are pronounced separately, as in *anthill*, not as in *anthem*. Similarly, *Edhelharn* “Elfstone”, is a compound *edhel+harn*.

So how do you know when to pronounce the letter-sequence “th” as **T+H**, and when to pronounce it as a single sound? The answer, unfortunately, is that you just have to memorize the (rare) cases where “th” represents **T+H**.

It's worth noting that the sounds **LH** and **RH** can't occur in the middle of a word, so if you see a word like *Edhelharn* or *Perhael* “Halfwise”, you know that the **H** should be a separate sound.

The Elvish writing system *tengwar* doesn't have this ambiguity, because the sounds **DH**, **LH**, **RH**, **TH** each have their own symbol. So recognizing letter combinations that should be split up isn't just relevant for pronunciation—you need to know this to write in *tengwar*, as well!

Stress

Sindarin, like English, puts emphasis or *stress* on one syllable of multi-syllable words. In English, stress can alter the meaning of a word, as in the following:

Sam received a **present** from Galadriel.
 We have to **present** our project to the class.

With the first syllable stressed, “present” is a noun. Stress the second syllable, “present”, and it becomes a verb.

In Sindarin, the stress of a word can’t change its meaning, but it’s vital to learn how words are stressed in order to write poetry. If you pronounce words with the wrong stress, you’ll just sound weird.

Fortunately, Sindarin stress is predicatable from the shape of the word, so you don’t have to memorize where the stress falls for each word individually. This section describes how to figure out which syllable is stressed.

Syllables

Before you can place the stress in a word, you have to break it down into syllables. Many people find this difficult at first, but there’s a trick to it: look at the vowels.

Each syllable has exactly one vowel or diphthong at its core—no more, no less. So *Elbereth Gilthoniel* breaks down as *El·be·reth Gil·tho·ni·el*. *Thranduil* has only two syllables, *Thran·duil*, because *ui* is a diphthong.

Stress in Two-Syllable Words

Tolkien states in Appendix E that “[i]n words of two syllables, [the stress] falls in practically all cases on the first syllable”. Thus we have *Per·hael* “Samwise”, *El·rond*.

Stress in Longer Words

The general rule for longer words is to stress the third-to-last syllable: *El·be·reth*, *Gil·tho·ni·el*, *Le·go·las*

However, the second-to-last syllable gets the stress if its vowel is:

- long (accented), as *i* in *Celebrián* (“Silver-queen”, Arwen’s mother)
- a diphthong, as *ae* in *Hithaeglir* (“the Misty Mountains”)
- or followed by multiple consonants: *Celebrimbor* (“Silver-fist”)

Note that in the last case it’s consonant *sounds*, not letters, that are important. *TH*, *DH*, etc. are single sounds even though they’re

represented by two letters, so the *th* in *Nimbrethil* doesn't cause the stress to move.

Possible Exceptions to the Stress Rules

There are some Sindarin names that don't seem to follow the stress rules outlined above, among them *Imladris* (Rivendell) and *Nargothrond*. These "should" be stressed *Imladris*, *Nargothrond*, because the second-to-last syllable of each is followed by two consonants. However, we can observe that both are stressed on the first syllable in poetry. This issue is covered in depth on page 104.

WRITING SYSTEMS

Lesson One:

Writing English with *Tengwar*

The *tengwar* (Quenya for “signs”) were the Elvish script in widest use during the Third Age. Following their invention by the elf Fëanor, they were adapted to many languages and in time became the dominant writing system of Middle-earth.

Even Sauron used *tengwar* to inscribe the One Ring:



It is worth noting that the One Ring inscription is not “in Elvish”. Though the letters are of Elvish design, the language is Sauron’s Black Speech. Transcribed into our Roman alphabet, the Ring inscription goes:

*Ash nazg durbatulûk, ash nazg gimbatul,
ash nazg thrakatulûk agh burzum-ishi krimpatul.*

Not sounds that any Elf would want to utter!

The great versatility of the *tengwar* in writing different languages led in Middle-earth to an explosion of spelling systems, called **TENGWAR MODES**, among which scribes could choose according to their whim or the custom of their time and place. Each mode was specific to a language—some were only for Sindarin, some for Quenya, some for Westron—but a single language could have many modes. By the Third Age there were at least three different Sindarin modes in use.

There was no mode in Middle-earth for writing English, of course, but Tolkien did create *tengwar* inscriptions in several different English modes. One of them was used in the *Lord of the Rings* films, and is presented here. Its first known use is in a Christmas letter Tolkien wrote to a fan, Hugh Brogan, so we’ll call it the Brogan Mode.

Figure 1 shows the main letters with their English equivalents. The two *tengwar* letters corresponding to TH are used for different sounds: **h** as in *thin* or *wreath* and **h̄** as in *this* or *wreathe*. The two letters

FIGURE 1
THE BROGAN TENGWAR MODE

A	ᵛ	J	ᵛᵛ	SH	ᵛ
B	ᵛᵛ	K	ᵛ	T	ᵛ
C	ᵛ	L	ᵛ	TH	ᵛ, ᵛᵛ
CH	ᵛ	M	ᵛᵛ	U	ᵛ
D	ᵛᵛ	N	ᵛᵛ	V	ᵛᵛ
E	ᵛ	NG	ᵛᵛ	W	ᵛ
F	ᵛ	O	ᵛ	WH	ᵛ
G	ᵛ	P	ᵛᵛ	X	ᵛ
GH	ᵛ	QU	ᵛᵛ	Y	ᵛ
H	ᵛ	R	ᵛ	Z	ᵛ
I	i	S	ᵛ	†Z	ᵛ

for Z come from different sources: Tolkien used ᵛ, but ʒ was used in the *Lord of the Rings* movies.

When you're putting these together into words, make sure the central curly bits (*lúvar* in Quenya) of the letters all sit on the same line. Here's an example:

ክስፍ ጾህህ ጾገገፍ ህፅ ክላ ገህህህህህ ህፅ
 ክላ ገገገፍ ጾህህ ህህ ክላ ጾህ ህህ ህህህህ
 ጾህህ ህህህህህህ

And here is the same text in a cursive style:

ክስፍ ጾህህ ጾገገፍ ህፅ ክላ ገህህህህህ ህፅ
 ክላ ገገገፍ ጾህህ ህህ ክላ ጾህ ህህ ህህህህ
 ጾህህ ህህህህህህ

Here's a rather silly sentence that uses all the letters. The dots between words are *tengwar* commas.

ቲገገህፍ · ቫህ ክላ ጾህህህ ህህ ህህህህህ ·
 ህህህህህ ህህ ክላ ጾህህህ ህህህህህ ህህ

Punctuation

The details of *tengwar* punctuation seem traditionally to have been up to the discretion and personal style of the scribe. A few regular conventions, however, were widely observed.

Many punctuation marks consisted of single dots or groups of dots, which could be stacked vertically or arranged into diamond or square patterns. In general, more dots indicated a longer pause. A single dot was often used where in English we'd use a comma; two dots could be used to indicate a longer pause, a semicolon, or a full stop. Four dots in a diamond or square often marked the end of a paragraph, but might also simply end a sentence.

A long dash was sometimes used—as in English—to set off a parenthetical remark from the surrounding text.

The Elves also used marks that functioned like our question mark (ፆ) and exclamation point (ፇ). They could be combined with other punctuation marks, so a question mark at the end of a sentence could be written ፆ:

FIGURE 3
WORD ABBREVIATIONS

and	𐌺	of	𐌺
the	𐌺	of the	𐌺

Letter Abbreviations

Several types of *tehtar*, or marks, can be used to abbreviate certain letter combinations.

Nasal Clusters

Consonant clusters beginning with an N or M (the so-called nasal consonants) can be abbreviated. Instead of writing the N or M out in full, you can write a wavy line above the following consonant. 𐌺𐌺𐌺𐌺 “ember”, 𐌺𐌺𐌺 “wand”, 𐌺𐌺𐌺 “camp”, 𐌺𐌺𐌺 “slant”. When the combination NG represents some sound other than that heard in “ring” (for example, N with a hard G as in “finger” or a soft G as in “ranger”), it can also be abbreviated: 𐌺𐌺𐌺𐌺 “change”.

The clusters NN and MM are written this way as well: 𐌺𐌺𐌺𐌺 “runner”, 𐌺𐌺𐌺𐌺 “common”.

Double Letters

A letter can be doubled by writing a bar underneath it. Thus: 𐌺𐌺𐌺𐌺 “letter”, 𐌺𐌺𐌺 “book”, 𐌺𐌺𐌺𐌺 𐌺𐌺𐌺 “cellar door”.

As noted above, NN and MM were written with a wavy line above the letter rather than a bar below.

Silent E

To abbreviate a silent E, place a dot under the consonant before it: 𐌺𐌺𐌺 “wave”, 𐌺𐌺𐌺 “were”, 𐌺𐌺𐌺 “thyme”.

FIGURE 4 TENGWAR NUMERALS			
1	τ	4	ᄀ
2	α	5	ᄁ
3	π	6	ᄂ
		7	ᄃ
		8	ᄄ
		9	ᄅ
		0	ᄆ

Final S

A single S at the end of a word can be reduced to a “hook” shape extending from the next-to-last letter: τᄃᄃ “aunts”, ᄃᄃᄃᄃ “breaks”, ᄃᄃᄃᄃ “falls”. This can be combined with the silent-E dot: λᄃᄃ “hopes”.

The S can also be written in full: ᄃᄃᄃᄃ “mazes”.

W and U

When W is the second element of a consonant cluster such as TW or DW, it can be abbreviated as a mark like a flattened S: ᄃᄃᄃ ᄃᄃᄃᄃ “two dwarves”. W or U after a vowel can be abbreviated the same way: ᄃᄃ “saw”, λᄃᄃ “house”, ᄃᄃᄃ “news”.

Numerals

The numerals used with the *tengwar* are shown in Figure 4. The Elves were accustomed to writing numbers “backwards” (from our perspective), with the ones-digit on the left. A number like 2,017 would thus be written in the order 7-1-0-2: ᄃᄃᄃᄃ. To distinguish the numerals from letters, bars or dots could be written above them: ᄃᄃᄃᄃ or ᄃᄃᄃᄃ.

Exercises

Write the following words in *tengwar*. The first one is done for you.

“elvish” λτβιδ

“writing” _____

“beekeepers” _____

“twice” _____

“quelled” _____

“south” _____

“whistles” _____

“smooth” _____

“always” _____

“though” _____

Can you read the following text?

ατβιδ γαδ βλατβιδιτα ρα ταρα βλαη ριηρη β
 βιριτα ρη λλο βιβραη αη β ρατβ · β β
 λαβιτα ηαβιτα ρα ρα: αβ αη ββιδ ελ λαρη
 ραρη ιβ β ρατβ λλο βιβραη γαδ ηλαρη=
 ιτα · ραρη ιρ λαρη ηα ριγρηηη αη γαβλαη=
 βταριαηη ιη ιρ · "β εταρ ιβ β β β βηη α
 ρατβ" · ββββ ατβιδ · "γβββ ριγρηηη αη
 γαβλαηβταριαηηβ" ∴

Lesson Two:

The Structure of the Tengwar

Many of the *tengwar* letters seem to be variations on a theme: one or two loops and a long stem pointing up or down. This is by design: the *tengwar* are a partly **FEATURAL SCRIPT**, in which the shape of a letter tells you how that letter sounds. The regularity of the system can make memorizing the *tengwar* a bit easier.

Figure 1 shows the main *tengwar* of the Brogan Mode, in the arrangement traditionally used by the Elves. In this arrangement, the patterns of sound and shape become evident.

The Four *Témar*

The Elves grouped the *tengwar* into four *témar* (Quenya for “series”), which are represented by the four columns of Figure 1. Their names are, in order from left to right: *tincotéma*, *parmatéma*, *calmatéma*, and *quessetéma*. The *témar* are named after their first letters *ṛ*, *ṗ*, *ç*, and *ṡ*, called *tinco* “metal”, *parma* “book”, *calma* “lamp”, and *quessë* “feather” in Quenya. The Elves considered these four letters to be the fundamental *tengwar*-shapes. The other *tengwar* in Figure 1 are variations on the four basic shapes.

The Six *Tyeller*

The six rows of Figure 1 correspond to the six *tyeller* or “grades” of letters recognized by the Elves. Each *tyellë* was used for sounds of a specific quality.

The First Row

The letters of the first row, *ṛ*, *ṗ*, *ç*, and *ṡ*, represent unvoiced **PLOSIVES**. These sounds stop the breath completely and release it suddenly with a little pop. See the section on pronunciation for an explanation of voiced vs. unvoiced sounds.

FIGURE 1 THE TENGWAR ORGANIZED BY FORM			
<i>tincotéma</i>	<i>parmatéma</i>	<i>calmatéma</i>	<i>quessetéma</i>
T ƒ	P ƒ	C ƒ	K ƒ
D ƒ	B ƒ	— ƒ	G ƒ
TH ƒ	F ƒ	SH ƒ	CH ƒ
TH ƒ	V ƒ	J ƒ	GH ƒ
N ƒ	M ƒ	— ƒ	NG ƒ
R ƒ	U ƒ	O ƒ	A ƒ

The Second Row

The second row is formed by doubling the *lúva* or “bow” of the fundamental letters. This adds **VOICE** or vocal cord vibration to the sound, making the “pop” a bit duller. Thus we get the sounds of ƒ, ƒ, and ƒ (ƒ isn’t used in the English mode).

The Third and Fourth Rows

These rows are formed from the first two by extending the *telco* or “stem” of each letter upward. This makes the sounds into **FRICATIVES**, which constrict the flow of breath but don’t quite stop it. This results in a sound like a fizz (if unvoiced) or a buzz (if voiced). As in the first two rows, voice is added to a sound if the *lúva* is doubled.

The resulting sounds are unvoiced ƒ TH (as in *cloth*), ƒ F, ƒ SH, and ƒ CH, and voiced ƒ TH (as in *clothes*), ƒ V, and ƒ J.

The Fifth and Sixth Rows

In the last two rows, the *telco* is shortened to be the same height as the *lúvar*. The Elves typically used these letters for **NASAL CONSONANTS** like N, M, and NG.

Here, the doubled *lúva* again corresponds to a voiced sound, but the single-*lúva* letters are not their unvoiced counterparts. The major Elvish languages lacked unvoiced nasals (as does English), so these letters were generally pressed into service as vowels. In some modes they were used for **SEMIVOWELS** like Y and W. The Brogan mode follows this tradition and assigns vowel sounds to these letters.

The sound R might seem out of place here, but in many dialects of English it behaves almost like a vowel: consider a word like *turn*, where the R-sound dominates and the U hardly registers.

The Quessë Variations

The English mode uses two modified versions of the letter *quessë* (𐌚): 𐌚̄ and 𐌚̅. In some Elvish modes, a mark like a flattened S above a letter indicated a following W; thus the use of 𐌚̄ for KW (= QU). The curl below the letter in 𐌚̅ indicates a following S (it's meant to be reminiscent of the *tengwa* for S, 𐌚̅); thus 𐌚̅ has the sound KS (= X).

The Other Tengwar

There are, of course, several *tengwar* that don't fit into the pattern of Figure 1, including 𐌚 W, 𐌚 L, and 𐌚 H. These must simply be memorized.

Terminology in This Chapter

The Elvish terms here are Quenya, not Sindarin. This is because the *tengwar* were invented by Fëanor, a Quenya-speaking Elf, and only used for Sindarin much later in Middle-earth's history.

tengwa — literally “sign”, this refers to a single Elvish letter. The plural, **tengwar** “signs”, is the word used to refer to the whole writing system.

tehta — a mark written above a *tengwa*. When writing English, they represent vowels. The plural is *tehtar*.

telco — literally “stem”; the vertical line that forms the backbone of many *tengwar*. The plural is *telqui*.

lúva — literally “bow”; the curved part of *tengwar* that have a *telco*. The plural is *lúvar*.

coronal consonant — a sound that involves the front of the tongue touching the upper teeth, or the roof of the mouth just behind the upper teeth. Examples include T, TH, D, and N.

labial consonant — a sound that involves closing or constricting the lips. Examples: P, F, B, and M.

velar consonant — a sound that involves the back of the tongue touching the *velum*, or soft palate, at the back of the mouth.

palatal consonant — a sound that involves contact between the tongue and the hard palate, near the middle of the roof of the mouth.

Lesson Three:

The English Ómatehta Mode

Ómatehtar, Quenya for “vowel-marks”, are the dots and curls often seen above *tengwar* letters (for example, in the Ring inscription). Essentially, they are abbreviations for vowel letters: rather than writing out the vowels in full, *ómatehta* modes represent them as marks above an adjacent consonant.

Since *ómatehtar* are such an iconic part of *tengwar*, I couldn’t resist including at least one English *ómatehta* mode in this book. The mode presented here was not created by Tolkien; it is a “simplified” mode invented by artist Daniel Reeve, who did much of the *tengwar* calligraphy for the *Lord of the Rings* films.

(Now is perhaps as good a time as any to note that the *h* of *tehtar* is not silent; it’s the slightly raspy sound heard in German *ich*. Thus *tehtar* is pronounced *TEKH-tar*.)

The Basics of Ómatehtar

Each of the vowels A E I O U (and Y as in *sky*) has a unique mark, or *tehta*, to represent it. The *tehtar* are shown in Figure 1. Since they are always written over a *tengwa* (or under it, in the case of Y), the letter *p* is used as a placeholder.

When written over a consonant, a *tehta* may represent either the vowel before or the vowel after that consonant. Thus, *ṗ* could stand for either *TA* or *AT*. You may use either convention when writing in the English mode, but one must always be consistent within a text (or it will be very hard to read what you’ve written!) Personally, I prefer to have the *tehtar* stand for the vowel *after* the consonant—I find it a bit easier to read that way.

Often you’ll find that you need to write a vowel but there’s no consonant to write it over. Trivial examples are one-vowel words like “I” and “a”. In such cases, the *tehta* cannot simply stand on its own, so we give it a silent “carrier” letter *ı* to sit on. Thus “I” would be written *ı̇* and “a” *ı̈*.

FIGURE 1
THE ÓMATEHTAR OR VOWEL-MARKS

A	ḗ	O	ṙ
E	ṙ	U	ṙ
I	ḗ	Y	ṙ̇

Usually, a *tengwa* may only have one vowel-*tehta* written over it, so vowel clusters like the EA in *tea* must use the silent carrier: ṙ̇ḗ.

The Reeve English Mode

It is possible to use the *tehtar*, as described above, as abbreviations of the vowels in the Brogan mode. That's not often done, however; for some reason most *tengwar* modes tend to use *ómatehtar* consistently, or not at all, and the Brogan mode is one of the ones that doesn't use them.

Daniel Reeve's English mode, presented below, is an example of a mode that *does* use *ómatehtar*. You will notice some similarities to the Brogan mode, but many of the letters have different English values.

Differences from the Brogan Mode

First, it is worth noting that almost all of the letters of the first five rows of the table have the same values as in the Brogan mode. The exceptions are *ccj* = J, *ccł* = H, and *cca* = NK.

You'll notice that there are two *tengwar* for R, two for W, and two for Y. The letters *ṙ*, *ṙ*, and *ca* are used at the end of a word and before a consonant: *ḗṙ* "far", *ṙca* "pay", *ḗṙ* "saw", *ḗṙṙṙ* "sawn". Elsewhere, *ṙ*, *o*, and *λ* are preferred: *ḗṙ* "raw", *óóṙ* "west", *áṙ* "yet".

The *tengwa* *ṙ*, not found in the Brogan mode, can be used for RH at the beginning of a word: *ṙṙ* "rhyme".

Word Abbreviations

The Reeve mode uses the same abbreviations for “and”, “the”, and “of the” as the Brogan mode, but “of” on its own is simply written **íh**.

Letter Abbreviations

The Reeve mode uses the same letter abbreviations as the Brogan mode for double consonants, nasal clusters, silent Es, and final S. Double vowels EE and OO are written by doubling the *tehta*: **ſſ** “too”, **ſſ** “see”.

Exercises

Write the following in the Reeve Mode using *tehtar*. The first one is done for you.

- “elvish” íhhd
- “writing” _____
- “beekeepers” _____
- “twice” _____
- “quelled” _____
- “south” _____
- “whistles” _____
- “smooth” _____
- “always” _____
- “though” _____

Can you read the following text?

árnárn þa celnú gſſþþ - ád ip þnþn kx íhþm -
 ál hſ íh im im hſþ: þn árnárn ip óþ ím iſþim
 ~ ád ip ſſmſſþ þnþn ſſmſſþ - ál hſ íh
 þááþþ :: íhnmóú ál ſſþþ ím þſſþ óſ . ílſþþ þnþ

ငါ ငါ့အဖေ နှင့် ငါ့အမိတို့ကို နှစ်ဖက်စလုံးက
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Lesson Four:

Writing Sindarin with *Tengwar*

In its most ancient form, Sindarin was only written using *cirth* or runes. However, when the Noldor brought the *tengwar* to Middle-earth, the Sindar readily adopted the new writing system.

The word *tengwar* is Quenya, not Sindarin—owing to the fact that the writing system is of Noldorin origin. The Sindarin word for the *tengwar* is *tîw*, but you'll rarely see this word outside of Sindarin texts. Most people call the writing system by its Quenya name, regardless of what language they're writing about. Many terms closely associated with *tengwar* (*telco*, *lúva*, *ómatehta*) are also Quenya.

The great versatility of the *tengwar* led to the development of many different Sindarin modes. By the Third Age there were at least three modes in use, each with its own spelling conventions. This book covers the two most common ones.

The Mode of Beleriand

The oldest Sindarin mode is that of Beleriand—the land where the Teleri led by Elwë dwelt, and where the first encounter between Sindarin and the *tengwar* occurred. This mode uses full *tengwar* rather than *ómatehtar* for vowels.

The letters of the Beleriand mode, shown in Figure 1, correspond one-to-one with Sindarin sounds. Because the letters of this mode represent Sindarin sounds, rather than letters in our alphabet, you may want to refer back to the chapter on pronunciation that starts on page 32.

You'll notice many similarities to the Brogan mode on page 40. Notable differences include the use of **ṅ** for N and **ṁ** for M (as **ṁṁ** and **ṁṁ** are used for the doubled versions of these consonants) and **ṛ** for R. It's uncertain what letter was used for **NG**. David Salo suggests **ṅṅ** in *A Gateway to Sindarin*, as does Måns Björkman on his website *Amanye Tenceli*. It's a reasonable guess since **ṅṅ** is used for NG in Quenya, and fits in with the general pattern of how the *tengwar* are assigned to sounds in Sindarin.

FIGURE 1 THE SINDARIN MODE OF BELERIAND							
<i>tincotéma</i>		<i>parmatéma</i>		<i>calmatéma</i>		<i>quessetéma</i>	
T	Ɔ	P	Ɔ	C	Ɔ	—	Ɔ
D	Ɔ	B	Ɔ	G	Ɔ	GW*	Ɔ
TH	Ɔ	F	Ɔ	CH	Ɔ	CHW	Ɔ
DH	Ɔ	V	Ɔ	—	Ɔ	—	Ɔ
NN	Ɔ	MM	Ɔ	NG*	Ɔ	—	Ɔ
N	Ɔ	M	Ɔ	O	Ɔ	W	Ɔ
R	Ɔ	RH*	Ɔ	L	Ɔ	LH*	Ɔ
S	Ɔ	Y	Ɔ	SS	Ɔ	—	Ɔ
E	Ɔ	H	Ɔ	U	Ɔ	HW	Ɔ
<hr/>							
A	Ɔ	AI	Ɔ	EI	Ɔ	OE	Ɔ
AE	Ɔ	AU	Ɔ	I	Ɔ	UI	Ɔ

The use of Ɔ and Ɔ for RH and LH is somewhat speculative, as these letters are not used in any known Beleriandic texts by Tolkien's hand. However, we know these letters were used for RH and LH in other Sindarin modes, and no other letters seem like more likely candidates.

Though most of the *tengwar* are Noldorin in origin, the letter \mathcal{d} is a purely Sindarin invention, necessitated by Sindarin's distinction between *HW* and *CHW*, which Quenya lacks. The Quenya name for this letter is *hwesta Sindarinwa*, or "Sindarin HW".

Vowels and Diphthongs

Long vowels were given an accent mark: $\acute{\mathcal{C}}$ represented \acute{a} or \hat{a} . The Sindarin term for this is *andaith* "long-mark".

The two letters for *I* were used in different contexts. The longer variant \mathcal{j} was used for *I* before a vowel at the beginning of a word, which has the sound of *Y* in *yes*. \mathcal{i} was used elsewhere, and had the sound of *I* in *machine*.

A dot was often placed above the letters for *I* and *A* to prevent them from being mistaken for the stem or bow of an adjacent letter: $\dot{\mathcal{C}}$, $\dot{\mathcal{i}}$, $\dot{\mathcal{j}}$.

For diphthongs, the scribes used a *tengwa* to represent the first vowel. A *tehta* above this was often used for the second vowel. However, Tolkien notes in Appendix E that "the diphthongs were often written out in full", as $\mathcal{c}\lambda$ for *AE* in the *tengwar* transcription of *A Elbereth Gilthoniel*. Perhaps this means that a diphthong like *AI*, normally abbreviated to $\acute{\mathcal{C}}$, could also be written $\mathcal{c}\mathcal{i}$.

Abbreviations

As shown in Figure 1, double *NN* and *MM* were represented by doubling the bow or *lúva* of \mathcal{n} and \mathcal{m} , producing \mathcal{nn} and \mathcal{mm} . An *N* or *M* before another consonant was abbreviated as a bar or wavy line above the consonant: \mathcal{f} for *NT*, \mathcal{m} for *MB*, etc. This will no doubt feel familiar if you learned the English *tengwar* modes in the preceding chapters. Note, however, that the other abbreviations used in the English modes do *not* occur in the Beleriand mode.

The Complicated Matter of *W*

A *W* following another consonant might have been written as a curl like a flattened *S* above the previous consonant. Thus, *NW* would be \mathcal{nw} , and *RW* would be \mathcal{rw} . It is also possible that the *W* would have simply been written \mathcal{w} .

Thus, a word like *Narwain* “January” might have been written in either of the following ways:

nc̃ȳč̃n · *Narwain* “January”

nc̃ȳȳč̃n · *Narwain* “January”

For **GW** there is an extra layer of complication because of Sindarin’s contact with Quenya. Quenya uses the *quessetéma* for clusters ending in W: KW (QU), NGW, HW, and NKW (NQU). It is likely the Sindar would have picked up this pattern when learning the *tengwar*—and there is some evidence that they did. In Appendix E, Tolkien writes that “*hwesta sindarinwa* [ɸ] or ‘Grey-elven *hw*’ was so called because in Quenya [ɸ] had the sound of *hw*, and distinct signs for *chw* and *hw* were not required.” The implication is that ɸ was used for **CHW** in Sindarin, and that this usage was inspired by Quenya. Because of this, we have reason to suspect that ȳ might have been used for **GW**.

It is also possible, of course, that the Sindar would have preferred to represent **GW** as č̃ȳ, to match the other consonant clusters. A word like *Gwirth* “April” could thus be written as either of the following:

ȳȳȳȳ · *Gwirth* “April”

č̃ȳȳȳ · *Gwirth* “April”

Ambiguities

When writing in *tengwar*, keep in mind that the Elves didn’t use our Roman alphabet, so they would have spelled Sindarin words according to their sound and not the letters we use to represent them. *Nef* ends with a “v” sound and so should be spelled nλb in *tengwar*. Similarly, ȳ is only used for **LH** when the single sound **LH** is meant. *Edhelharn*, being a compound *Edhel* + *harn*, would be spelt λbλȳλcȳn. The issue of spelling ambiguities is covered on page 36.

A Sample Text

Armed with your new knowledge, you can try deciphering the following *tengwar* text. Bonus points if you know where it’s from!

բարս ԵՂԵան Ե Եռու

If you want to try your hand at translating the Sindarin as well, here's a clue: all the words can be found in the vocabulary list that starts on page 28.

The Sindarin *Ómatehta* Mode

Ómatehtar were not used until late in Sindarin's history. The Sindarin *ómatehta* mode is associated mainly with the Men of Gondor, and is sometimes called the Mode of Gondor.

The consonant letters follow mostly the same patterns in the Mode of Beleriand, except for **C**, **CH**, and **G**. In Gondor, the letters **ç**, **çç**, and **ç** were used for writing the sounds *ch* (as in *church*), *j*, and *sh*, which were common in the Westron language. Gondorians thus preferred to use **ç**, **ç**, and **ç** for Sindarin **C**, **CH**, and **G**.

Vowels are indicated by a *tehta* above the following consonant.

an	ṅ	in	ṅ	un	ṅ
en	ṅ	on	ṅ	yn	ṅ

What if there's no consonant immediately following the vowel? In that case, the vowel *tehta* is placed on a carrier *tengwa* 1. The carrier has no sound of its own; it just gives the *tehta* a place to sit.

ṅṅṅ · *pedo* "speak"
 ççç · *Gilthoniel*

For long vowels, the *andaith* of course can't be used. Instead, the *tehta* is placed on a long carrier letter ȷ. This type of carrier is used even if there's a following consonant.

ȷȷȷ · *míriel*

R, S, and Y

The *ómatehta* mode uses two different letters for **R**: **ȷ** and **ṅ**. **ṅ** is used at the end of words, while **ȷ** is used elsewhere.

FIGURE 2 THE SINDARIN MODE OF GONDOR								
<i>tincotéma</i>	<i>parmatéma</i>	<i>calmatéma</i>	<i>quessetéma</i>					
T	Ɔ	P	Ɔ	—	Ɔ	C	Ɔ	
D	Ɔ	B	Ɔ	—	Ɔ	G	Ɔ	
TH	Ɔ	F	Ɔ	—	Ɔ	CH	Ɔ	
DH	Ɔ	V	Ɔ	—	Ɔ	—	Ɔ	
N	Ɔ	M	Ɔ	—	Ɔ	NG	Ɔ	
R	Ɔ	—	Ɔ	—	Ɔ	W	Ɔ	
R	Ɔ	RH	Ɔ	L	Ɔ	LH	Ɔ	
S	Ɔ	S	Ɔ	SS	Ɔ	SS	Ɔ	
I	Ɔ	H	Ɔ	—	Ɔ	HW	Ɔ	
AE		Ɔ	AU		Ɔ	OE		Ɔ
AI		Ɔ	EI		Ɔ	UI		Ɔ

Abbreviations

The *ómatehta* mode uses the same abbreviations as the Mode of Beleriand, plus a few more. A bar below a *tengwa* indicates that the

letter is doubled. However, double **NN** and **MM** use the wavy line above instead—just like in the Mode of Beleriand, this indicates a preceding nasal sound.

SINDARIN GRAMMAR

Lesson One:

Many Greetings

If you find yourself among elvenfolk, you will probably want to start your conversations with the basics: “hello”, “goodbye”, “please”, and “thank you”. This chapter will teach you the rudiments of conversation.

Saying Hello

Mae govannen “[You are] well met” is a common informal greeting. This phrase is a contracted version of *Mae ci govannen*, *ci* being an informal, affectionate way of saying “you”. Because of this, *Mae govannen* is best reserved for people you already know well. For more formal situations, such as greeting someone you’re not yet close to, you might try substituting the formal pronoun *le*: *Mae le govannen*.

Suilad, meaning simply “greeting”, is an all-purpose way of saying hello. It’s not known for certain whether words of this form can be pluralized, but in movie-Sindarin they can: *†suilaid* means “greetings”. This opens the door to more effusive variants like *†rim suilaid* “many greetings”, or *†meneg suilaid* “a thousand greetings”. Other variants include *le suilon* “I greet you”, and the more formal *le suilannon* “I give you greeting”.

If you’re aiming for a formal greeting with a little flourish, you can say *Êl síla na lû govaned ’wín* “A star shines on the hour of our meeting”.

Introductions

To tell someone your name, just fill in the blank:

_____ *i eneth nín* “My name is _____”.

You can also turn this around into a question to ask someone for their name:

Man i eneth lín? “What is your name?”

Another good way of introducing yourself is ____ *estar nin* “They call me ____”.

People will probably be able to tell that you’re not a native Sindarin speaker, so as part of introducing yourself you can tell them where you’re from: ____ *i mar nin* “My home is ____”.

Elvish Names

In order to properly introduce yourself in Sindarin, you’ll need an Elvish name. Choose your name with care. Sindarin names almost always mean something, and in Elvish tradition names were chosen or bestowed based on the person’s character, achievements, or personal qualities. Because of this, your chosen name will affect people’s first impression of you.

A comprehensive list of Sindarin names and their meanings is beyond the scope of this chapter, but a web search for “Sindarin name list” will turn up good resources.

Saying Goodbye

Elaborate leave-takings seem to have been a fairly universal custom in Middle-earth. As such, Sindarin has many ways to wish people well when you part.

The simplest farewell is perhaps *novaer*, meaning “be good”, as in “be in good health”. *Cuio vae* “live well” expresses a similar sentiment.

If the other party is leaving your meeting-place and you’re staying (for instance, if they were visiting you at your house), you can wish them well on their travels:

Calo Anor na ven lín “May the sun shine on your road”

If you’re leaving and the other party is staying, you’ll have to wish them well in a different way:

No galu na mar lín “May good fortune be upon your house”

No i Mbelain na le “May the Valar be with you”

Such phrases, oft repeated, would probably have become abbreviated. An Elf leaving the house of a friend might utter a simple [†]*Belain na le* “Valar [be] with you”.

For a more casual way of saying goodbye, you could try these:

N’adovaned “Until we meet again”

N’adgened “Until I see you again”

Saying Please

Tolkien never revealed what the Sindarin words for “please” and “thank you” might be, but there are several fan-translations of these phrases in common use.

Translating “please” is complicated because English uses the word in two almost contradictory ways. “Please” can soften a request, making it more polite. But it can also intensify a request, as if you are begging or imploring the other person to do something.

One way to translate a polite request into Sindarin is by analogy with French *s’il vous plaît*, literally, “if it pleases you”.

**cí athol* “If you are willing”

[†]*cí athach* “If you are willing”

A more casual way of softening a request is to simply say *anim*, “for me”.

**Holo i fennas anim.* “close the door for me”

To beg someone to do something, you can try:

Le nallon! “I beg you!” (lit. “I cry to you”)

The Complicated History of Thank You

When translating “thank you” for the Lord of the Rings movies, David Salo drew inspiration from the Quenya verb *hanta-* “to thank”, arriving at Sindarin [†]*le hannon*. There’s just one problem with this, though: it violates the historical sound change rules of Sindarin. As Helge Fauskanger and others have pointed out, the Primitive Elvish ancestor of Quenya *hanta-* would *not* have produced **hanna-* in Sindarin

if it underwent the normal sound change rules—instead, we’d get **anna-*.

Unfortunately, we can’t use **anna-* to mean “thank” in Sindarin, because *anna-* already means “give”. **Le annon* means “I give you”, not “I thank you”.

In spite of this problem, Salo’s translation *le hannon* is still in widespread use on the Web, and therefore must be considered part of the *living* Sindarin language.

To avoid the use of *le hannon*, Sindarin scholar Fiona Jallings suggests the paraphrase *le fael*, literally “you are generous”.

If you want to sound less formal, and you’re okay with dubious movie-Sindarin, you can simply say *†hennaid* “thanks”.

Apologies

If you try to befriend elves, chances are you’ll make an ass of yourself at some point and want to apologize. Tolkien provides two ways of asking forgiveness:

Díheno nin! “Forgive me!”

Goheno nin! “Forgive me!”

Díheno seems to be used when asking forgiveness from a superior, or someone in a position of authority. *Goheno* may connote forgiveness among peers, or perhaps simply mutual reconciliation. Both of these words come from his Sindarin translation of the Lord’s Prayer:

ar díheno ammen i úgerth vin

And forgive us our trespasses

sui mín i gohenam di ai gerir úgerth ammen

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lesson Two:

Wishes and Commands

The **IMPERATIVE** form of a verb is the form used for directly telling someone to do something. In English, it's the simplest verb form, with no endings added: *eat, drink, and be merry!*

In Sindarin, imperative verbs are used for commands and wishes. Many examples can be found in *The Lord of the Rings*:

- Glorfindel's cry to his horse Asfaloth: **Noro lim, noro lim Asfaloth!** No translation is given, but **noro lim** probably means "Run fast!"
- Haldir's command to the Fellowship in Lórien: **Daro!** "Halt!"
- Sam's invocation of Elbereth, which ends **A tiro nín, Fanuilos!** "O look towards me, Everwhite!"
- The cry **Eglerio!** "Glorify [them]!", celebrating Frodo and Sam after Sauron is defeated.

It's not hard to create the imperative form of a verb from its dictionary form: just add **o** to the end. If the dictionary form of the verb ends in an **a**, drop the **a** before adding **o**.

linna- "sing" → **linno**

car- "do" or "make" → **caro**

beria- "protect" → **berio**

cen- "see" → **ceno**

The Dictionary Verb-form

Sindarin wordlists almost always list verbs by a special "dictionary form", which ends in a dash. The dictionary form can't be used as-is; you have to add endings to use the verb in a sentence.

Direct Objects

Some verbs don't make a whole lot of sense without a target or **DIRECT OBJECT** for the action. For example, you probably wouldn't say **berio!** "protect!" in Sindarin without specifying *what* to protect. You'd

generally say something like *berio i pherian!* “protect the hobbits!”, in which case “the hobbits” would be the direct object.

The direct object can also be a PRONOUN, like “her”, “him”, or “me”. The grammar for using pronouns as direct objects is simpler than the grammar for using nouns, so this lesson only covers pronouns.

The table below lists the pronouns you can use as direct objects. As in English, they come after the verb:

Dago hon! “Kill him!”

Aphado hain! “Follow them!”

Tiro nin! “Watch me!”

Berio ven! “Protect us!”

	Singular	Plural
1 st person	<i>nin</i> “me”	<i>ven</i> “us”
2 nd person	<i>le</i> “yourself”	† <i>le</i> “yourselves”
2 nd p. familiar	<i>gin</i> “yourself”	—
3 rd person	<i>han</i> “him/her/it”, † <i>hon</i> “him”, † <i>hen</i> “her”	<i>hain</i> “them”

The second person *le* can be used whether you are addressing one person or many. However, as you may remember from the Preface, the † symbol before the plural version means that the use of *le* to address more than one person is from the *Lord of the Rings* movies, not Tolkien’s works.

In addition to *le*, there is a special “familiar” second person form *gin*, which you would only use when speaking one-on-one with someone you’re very close to. Because it’s only used in intimate conversation, there is no plural form. It’s perhaps worth noting that in the *Lord of the Rings* films, the familiar pronoun isn’t used at all—so even when Arwen and Aragorn are speaking to each other, they use *le*.

In the third person, we have the gender-neutral *han* (singular) and *hain* (plural). These pronouns can be used for people, animals, and things. If you want to specify a person’s gender, there are also the pronouns †*hon* “him” and †*hen* “her”. The gendered pronouns come from one of Tolkien’s early revisions of the language, and it’s not clear if they were still part of Sindarin at the time he was writing *The Lord of the Rings*. They are used extensively in the films, though, so it’s useful to know them.

Commands with Subjects

An imperative verb in Sindarin may also have a **SUBJECT** referring to the person doing the action. This construction is rare in English, but you can still see it in stage directions: *Enter Aragorn stage left*. Here, “Enter” is the imperative verb (it’s telling Aragorn what to do), and “Aragorn” is the subject.

This translates easily to Sindarin, keeping the same word order:

Minno Aragorn! “Let Aragorn enter!”

Pedo mellon! “May a friend speak!”

The Interjection *A*

When giving someone a direct command or wishing them well (or ill!) you can add the **INTERJECTION *A***, which emphasizes the fact that you’re directly addressing a person. This can go before either the verb or the subject, depending on which one you want to emphasize.

Minno, A Aragorn! “Enter, O Aragorn!”

A minno, Aragorn! “O enter, Aragorn!”

Note that this interjection *A* is always capitalized when writing Sindarin with our alphabet. This helps keep it from being confused with the word for “and”, which is *a*.

Putting it all together

You can combine any or all of these techniques in a single imperative sentence. The word order is *verb, subject, direct object, person being addressed*.

Berio Belain le, A Aragorn “May the Valar protect you, O Aragorn”

Tiro ven, Elbereth! “Guard us, Elbereth!”

Exercises

Make these dictionary-form verbs into commands. The first one is done for you as an example.

- linna-* → linno! “Sing!”
ped- → _____ “Speak!”
mad- → _____ “Eat!”
maetha- → _____ “Fight!”
mel- → _____ “Love!”
muda- → _____ “Work!”
teitha- → _____ “Write!”
cab- → _____ “Leap!”

Translate the commands below into Sindarin, using the verbs provided. The first one is done for you.

- “Protect them!” (*beria-*) ~ Berio hain!
 “Follow us!” (*aphad-*) ~ _____
 “Hear me!” (*lasta-*) ~ _____
 “Heal him!” (*nesta-*) ~ _____
 “Trust her!” (†*estelia-*) ~ _____
 “Look at yourself!” (*cen-*) ~ _____

Translate the curses below into Sindarin, using the verbs and subjects provided. The first one is done for you.

“May the Valar forsake you!” (*awartha-* “forsake”, *Belain* “the Valar”)

Awartho Belain le!

“May Mandos judge them!” (*badh-* “judge”)

 “May a frog eat him!” (*mad-* “eat”, *cabor* “a frog”)

“May a spider catch her!” (*gwedh*- “bind, *catch in a web”,
ungol “a spider”)

“May a dwarf kill me!” (*dag*- “kill”, *naug* “a dwarf”)

Lesson Three:

Soft Mutation

The system of **CONSONANT MUTATIONS** in Sindarin is one of the language's most iconic features. Mutations cause the first letter of a word to change under certain conditions.

Sindarin has several types of consonant mutation. Though Tolkien scholars disagree on exactly how many there are, it seems clear that at least three different types of mutation can occur.

In this lesson, however, we'll just be covering the most common mutation: the **SOFT MUTATION**. In other texts, you might see this mutation referred to as **LENITION** (from the Latin for "softening"). The name comes from the fact that this mutation tends to make consonants quieter or less abrupt. For example, it changes the poppy **P** sound into a more subdued **B**, and **D** into **DH**. The full set of changes is described below.

Mutation Triggers

Consonants don't just mutate for the heck of it. Something has to trigger the mutation. In Sindarin, there are two basic reasons for a consonant to mutate:

PHONOLOGICAL (sound-based) mutations occur when certain sounds appear next to each other. You can imagine these mutations as the result of early Sindarin-speaking Elves changing a hard-to-pronounce sequence of sounds into an easier one.

GRAMMATICAL mutations are just required by particular grammar rules, and aren't related to any historical sound-sequence.

In this chapter, we'll be looking at two causes of the soft mutation, one phonological and one grammatical.

The Article *i*

The word for "the" in Sindarin is *i*. This type of word is called an **ARTICLE**. As in English, *i* comes before the noun it modifies.

aran “king” → *i aran* “the king”

edhel “elf” → *i edhel* “the elf”

Sometimes, a dot or dash is placed between *i* and the following noun, to indicate the close relationship between the words.

estel “hope” → *i·estel* “the hope”

As you might have already guessed from my foreshadowing above, the article *i* causes soft mutation on the following noun. This is a phonological mutation.

Here are the changes caused by the soft mutation:

Original → Mutated	Example
B → V	<i>barad</i> → <i>i varad</i> “the tower”
C → G	<i>cair</i> → <i>i gair</i> “the ship”
D → DH	<i>dúlin</i> → <i>i dhúlin</i> “the nightingale”
F doesn’t change	<i>fang</i> → <i>i fang</i> “the beard”
G → ’	<i>galadh</i> → <i>i ’aladh</i> “the tree”
H → CH	<i>haew</i> → <i>i chaew</i> “the habit”
HW → CHW	<i>hwinn</i> → <i>i chwinn</i> “the birch”
L doesn’t change	<i>lû</i> → <i>i lû</i> “the time”
LH → THL	<i>lhewig</i> → <i>i thlewig</i> “the ear”
M → V	<i>mellon</i> → <i>i vellon</i> “the friend”
N doesn’t change	<i>naur</i> → <i>i naur</i> “the fire”
P → B	<i>perian</i> → <i>i berian</i> “the hobbit”
R doesn’t change	<i>rath</i> → <i>i rath</i> “the street”
RH → THR	<i>rhaw</i> → <i>i thraw</i> “the flesh”
S → H	<i>saew</i> → <i>i haew</i> “the poison”
T → D	<i>tawar</i> → <i>i dawar</i> “the forest”
TH doesn’t change	<i>thond</i> → <i>i thond</i> “the root”

That table might look scary, but there are only a few basic patterns of sound change there; they’re just obscured by the alphabetical ordering. The next sections explain the patterns.

Soft Mutation of T, P, and C

The *unvoiced plosives T, P, and C* become *voiced plosives D, B, G*.

tawar “forest” → *i dawar* “the forest”

perian “hobbit” → *i berian* “the hobbit”

calad “light” → *i galad* “the light”

Soft Mutation of D, B, and G

The *voiced plosives D, B* become *spirants DH and V*.

dû “night” → *i dhû* “the night”

brôg “bear” → *i vrôg* “the bear”

In ancient forms of Sindarin, *G* also became a spirant: the guttural sound that’s spelled *GH* in the Black Speech. Over the years, this sound faded into inaudibility (probably because the Elves didn’t much like it). By the Third Age it had completely disappeared, which means that *G* becomes silent when soft-mutated in modern Sindarin.

When writing Sindarin in our alphabet, we use an apostrophe in place of the vanished *G*. In *tengwar*, a similar symbol, called a *gasdil* or stopgap, is used.

goe “terror, great fear” → *i ’oe* “the terror”

gwath “shadow” → *i ’wath* “the shadow”

Soft Mutation of M

The sound *M* becomes *V*.

men “way” → *i ven* “the way”

Soft Mutation of S and H

S becomes *H*, and *H* becomes *CH*.

saew “poison” → *i haew* “the poison”

haew “habit” → *i chaew* “the habit”

Soft Mutation of LH, RH, and HW

The remaining voiceless sounds, *LH*, *RH*, and *HW*, become *THL*, *THR*, and *CHW*

lhûg “serpent” → *i thlûg* “the serpent”

rhaw “flesh” → *i thraw* “the flesh”

hwest “breeze” → *i chwest* “the breeze”

Mutate sounds, not letters

It is perhaps worth noting that mutations apply to *sounds*, not letters. For example, *TH* is not affected by soft mutation, because it is a separate sound distinct from *T* + *H*. However, clusters like *TR* are mutated since they actually contain a *T* sound.

thûl “breath” → *i thûl* “the breath”

trenarn “tale” → *i drenarn* “the tale”

Direct Objects

The soft mutation is also triggered on any noun that’s the **DIRECT OBJECT** of a verb. You can think of the direct object as the “target” of the action. It contrasts with the **SUBJECT**, which is the “doer” of the action. In Sindarin, as in English, the direct object usually comes after the verb.

Direct objects are often combined with imperative verbs:

Mado vast! “Eat bread!” (← *bast*)

Sogo viruvor! “Drink *miruvor*!” (← *miruvor*)

Berio ’aladh! “Protect a tree!” (← *galadh*)

Teitho dêw! “Write a *tengwar*-letter!” (← *têw*)

Eglerio Valan! “Glorify a *Vala*!” (← *Balan*)

You might notice there’s no Sindarin word corresponding to the English “a” in these examples. Sindarin has no word for “a” or “an”—it’s implied if the definite article *i* is absent.

If you add *i*, the meaning changes thusly:

Mado i vast! “Eat the bread!” (← *bast*)

Sogo i viruvor! “Drink the *miruvor*!” (← *miruvor*)

Berio i ’aladh! “Protect the tree!” (← *galadh*)

Teitho i dêw! “Write the letter!” (← *têw*)

Eglerio i Valan! “Glorify the *Vala*!” (← *Balan*)

Only mutate once

One question you might have in mind at this point is: what happens if a word is *both* a direct object *and* preceded by the article *i*? Does the mutation happen twice?

The answer is **no**. Only one round of consonant mutation is *ever* performed on a given word. For example:

Aphado i berian! “Follow the hobbit!” (← *perian*)

Here, *perian* “hobbit” is only mutated once, despite it both being both a direct object and having *i* attached. We don’t, in other words, mutate once to *i berian* because of the *i* and then again to *i verian* because it’s a direct object.

Words With Irregular Mutation

There are a few words that don’t fit the mutation patterns described above. These words are special because they began with NASALIZED STOP consonants (**MB**, **ND**, and **NG**) in Old Sindarin. In the Third-age Sindarin we’re learning, these words have dictionary forms beginning in **B**, **D**, or **G**.

The soft mutation of these words works as follows. The initial stop consonants become NASALS **M**, **N**, and **NG**.

dîr “man” → *i nîr* “the man”

bâr “home” → *i mâr* “the home”

gaur “werewolf” → *i ngaur* “the werewolf”

Pronouncing **NG** (as in *ring*) at the beginning of a word can be tricky for English speakers. Practice drawing out the **ng** sound and following it up with the rest of the word: **ing-nnnngaur**. With a bit of work, you’ll soon be able to pronounce this sound easily.

You can find a list of words that mutate irregularly on page 108.

Exercises

Add the definite article *i* to the following nouns, making sure to apply soft mutation where appropriate. The first one is done for you.

- dring* → *i dhring* “the hammer”
cam → _____ “the hand”
sam → _____ “the room”
thond → _____ “the root”
meleth → _____ “the love”
calad → _____ “the light”
rochir → _____ “the knight”
tegil → _____ “the pen”
parf → _____ “the book”
hwand → _____ “the sponge”
hammad → _____ “the clothing”
guru → _____ “the death”
lhûg → _____ “the serpent”
trann → _____ “the shire”
fennas → _____ “the gate”

Translate the following commands, making sure to use the soft mutation and definite article *i* where needed. The first one is done for you.

- leithia-*, *pilin* → *Leithio bilin!* “Release an arrow!”
dag-, *lhûg* → _____ “Kill the serpent!”
hol-, *fennas* → _____ “Close the gate!”
edra-, *sarch* → _____ “Open the grave!”
linna-, *glind* → _____ “Sing a song!”
[†]*ebyr-*, *glamog* → _____ “Chase the orc!”
aphada-, *rohir* → _____ “Follow a knight!”
teitha-, *parf* → _____ “Write a book!”

Translate the following wishes. The first two are done for you.

† cel-, cair, perian → *Celo cair i berian.*

“Let a ship carry the hobbit.”

linna-, maeron, laer → *Linno i vaeron laer.*

“Let the poet sing a song.”

beria-, maethor, barad → _____

“Let a warrior protect the tower.”

ortha-, gwaith, haudh → _____

“Let the people raise a burial mound.”

Lesson Four:

Possession

POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS—*my, your, their*—tell you who owns something. When analyzing the pronouns of a language, it’s convenient to organize them into a tidy table, like this:

	Singular Possessor	Plural Poss.
1 st person	<i>nîn</i> “my”	<i>vîn, ’wîn</i> “our”
2 nd p. familiar	<i>gîn</i> “your”	<i>lîn</i> “your”
2 nd p. formal	<i>lîn</i> “your”	<i>lîn</i> “your”
3 rd person	<i>dîn</i> “his, her, its, their”	
3 rd p. refl.	<i>în</i> “his/her/their own”	

Word Order

In English, possessive pronouns precede the noun they’re modifying, but in Sindarin they follow it: *my book* vs. *parf nîn*.

Using the Pronouns

The Sindarin pronouns don’t correspond one-to-one with English pronouns, so care is required when translating. The next few sections describe how to translate each English possessive pronoun to Sindarin.

My

The Sindarin word for “my” is simple enough: *nîn*.

bâr nîn “my home”

glim nîn “my voice”

Our

There are two words in Sindarin corresponding to the English pronoun “our”: *vîn* and *'wîn*. (Technically, these are both mutated forms: the dictionary forms are *mîn* and *gwîn*. However, these pronouns are always mutated in actual usage.)

Vîn is the **EXCLUSIVE** form—used when the person you’re talking to is not included in the “us” group.

Noss vîn “our family” (speaking to someone who is not a member of the family)

Govannas vîn “our fellowship” (speaking to someone who is not a member of the fellowship)

'Wîn, on the other hand, is the **INCLUSIVE** form, used when the person you’re addressing is a member of the “us” group.

Govaned 'wîn “our meeting” (speaking to the person you met)

Noss 'wîn “our family” (speaking to a member of your family)

Your

Second-person pronouns in Sindarin distinguish between two types of social situations: the **FAMILIAR** form is used when talking to a child, a family member, or a close friend, while the **FORMAL** form is used with everyone else.

bâr gîn “your home” (speaking to a loved one)

bâr lîn “your home” (speaking to an acquaintance)

Note that the familiar pronoun *gîn* is a mutated form; the dictionary form is *cîn*.

The formal second-person pronoun *lîn* is the same regardless of how many people you’re addressing:

bâr lîn “your home” (speaking to one person)

bâr lîn “your home” (speaking to a crowd)

The familiar pronoun has no plural form. *Lîn* is used to mean “your”, even when speaking to a group of people you’re close to.

bâr lîn “your home” (speaking to your whole family)

What if you use the wrong second-person pronoun with someone? If you use *gîn* with a stranger, you’re treating them like a child—belittling them. Using the “wrong” form intentionally can therefore be a subtle way to insult someone.

On the other hand, using the formal form with a loved one distances you from them, perhaps hinting that you wish your relationship with them were ended.

His, Her, Its, Their

Third-person pronouns are one area of Sindarin grammar where it’s especially hard to piece together a consistent picture from Tolkien’s notes. As a result, there are as many different analyses of the third-person pronouns as there are Sindarin scholars.

In my analysis, the third-person pronouns don’t distinguish gender or number. The word *dîn* (mutated; the dictionary form is *tîn*) can mean “its”, “his”, “her”, or “their”.

However, there’s a special REFLEXIVE pronoun *în* that’s used when the possessor is the SUBJECT of the sentence. This distinction may seem subtle, but it’s sometimes important. For example:

Aragorn suila Théoden a mâb i roch î

“Aragorn greets Théoden and takes his own (Aragorn’s) horse”

Aragorn suila Théoden a mâb i roch dîn

“Aragorn greets Théoden and takes his (Théoden’s) horse”

Whether or not Aragorn is a horse-thief in this scenario depends on the pronoun you choose.

In English, we sometimes make a similar distinction using “own”: *his own horse* seems to refer unambiguously to *Aragorn’s horse*.

The Definite Article and Possessives

In English, you can't use both a possessive pronoun and an article like "a" or "the" on the same noun. For instance, you can say "a friend", "the friend", or "my friend", but not "a my friend" or "the my friend".

Not so in Sindarin! It's very common to say something like *i vellon nîn* "my friend", combining both the definite article *i* and the possessive pronoun *nîn*.

Perhaps the easiest way to explain this construction is by looking at what happens when you leave out the article *i*. *Mellon nîn*, for example, means "a friend of mine" or "one of my friends". That is, it implies the friend in question is a new topic of conversation, and makes no assumption that your audience knows which friend you're talking about.

On the other hand, *i vellon nîn* means you're talking about one specific friend, and it's the same friend you've already been talking about.

One notable case where you *don't* use the definite article is when directly addressing someone. For instance, when addressing your audience as "my friend", just say *mellon nîn*.

Movie-Sindarin Pronouns

Pronouns are one area where the Sindarin used in the *Lord of the Rings* films differs significantly from our current understanding of the language. We simply didn't know much about Sindarin pronouns in the early 2000s, when the movies were being produced.

For starters, movie-Sindarin makes no distinction between the inclusive and exclusive first person pronouns; "our" is always *vîn*.

Additionally, characters in the movies use only the formal second-person pronouns. Even when Arwen and Aragorn are talking to each other, they use *lîn*.

The table for Movie-Sindarin possessive pronouns looks like this:

	Singular Possessor	Plural Poss.
1 st person	<i>nîn</i> "my"	<i>vîn</i> "our"
2 nd person	<i>lîn</i> "your"	<i>lîn</i> "your"
3 rd person	<i>dîn</i> "his, her, its, their" <i>în</i> "his/her/their own"	

A Note on Accents

You'll notice that each of these pronouns contains a long (accented) vowel. Tolkien was inconsistent about indicating this. Sometimes, he used a circumflex, sometimes an acute accent (e.g. *nín*) and sometimes no accent at all.

Using Nouns as Possessors

The possessor in a phrase doesn't have to be a pronoun. It can be a noun, as in *the king's ship*, *a bird's nest*. In English, you can indicate a possessive relationship by adding 's to the possessor, or by using a construction with *of*: *the boat of the moon*.

In Sindarin, there's just one way to form this type of possessive: put the possessor after the thing possessed. The word order is the same as the English construction with "of", except the "of" is dropped.

talan aew "nest of a bird"

cair aran "ship of a king"

lhunt Ithil "boat of the Moon"

When the possessor is DEFINITE (i.e. when you'd use the definite article "the" in English), you have a choice: You can use either the regular definite article *i*, or a special possessive form *en*. When using *en*, the words are often connected with dashes:

Cabed-en-Aras "Leap of the Deer (a river gorge in Beleriand)"

Condir i Drann "Mayor of the Shire"

The possessive article *en* causes the following word to mutate. This type of mutation is called the MIXED MUTATION, because it combines elements of both soft mutation and nasal mutation (which we haven't seen yet). An additional complication is that the *en* itself sometimes changes to *e* or *edh*.

The mixed mutation is as follows:

Original → Mutated	Example
EN B → E-B	<i>barad</i> → <i>e-barad</i> “of the tower”
EN C → E-G	<i>cair</i> → <i>e-gair</i> “of the ship”
EN D → E-D	<i>dúlin</i> → <i>e-dúlin</i> “of the nightingale”
EN DR → EN-DR	<i>draug</i> → <i>en-draug</i> “of the wolf”
EN F → EN-F	<i>fang</i> → <i>en-fang</i> “of the beard”
EN G → E-G	<i>galadh</i> → <i>e-galadh</i> “of the tree”
EN GL → EN-GL	<i>glim</i> → <i>en-glim</i> “of the voice”
EN GR → EN-GR	<i>groth</i> → <i>en-groth</i> “of the cavern”
EN GW → EN-GW	<i>gwaith</i> → <i>en-gwaith</i> “of the people”
EN H → E-CH	<i>haew</i> → <i>e-chaew</i> “of the habit”
EN HW → E-'W	<i>hwinn</i> → <i>e-'winn</i> “of the birch”
EN L → E-L	<i>lû</i> → <i>e-lû</i> “of the time”
EN LH → E-'L	<i>lhewig</i> → <i>e-'lewig</i> “of the ear”
EN M → E-M	<i>mellon</i> → <i>e-mellon</i> “of the friend”
EN N → EN-N	<i>naur</i> → <i>e-naur</i> “of the fire”
EN P → E-B	<i>perian</i> → <i>e-berian</i> “of the hobbit”
EN R → EDH-R	<i>rath</i> → <i>edh-rath</i> “of the street”
EN RH → E-'R	<i>rhaw</i> → <i>e-'raw</i> “of the flesh”
EN S → E-H	<i>saew</i> → <i>e-haew</i> “of the poison”
EN T → E-D	<i>tawar</i> → <i>e-dawar</i> “of the forest”
EN TH → E-TH	<i>thond</i> → <i>e-thond</i> “of the root”
EN TR → EN-DR	<i>trann</i> → <i>en-drann</i> “of the shire”

For words that began with nasalized plosives in Old Sindarin, the mixed mutation brings the nasalized plosive back:

Original → Mutated	Example
EN B → E-MB	<i>bâr</i> → <i>e-mbar</i> “of the home”
EN D → E-ND	<i>dîr</i> → <i>e-ndîr</i> “of the man”
EN G → E-ÑG	<i>galad</i> → <i>e-ñgalad</i> “of the light”

These consonant clusters look scary, but aren't—they can simply be pronounced as if the dash weren't there: *embâr*, *endîr*, *engalad*.

Of course, you can avoid all that complexity by just using the definite article *i* when forming the possessive. You *will* need the mixed mutation later, though, so you might as well get a head start on it now.

Adjectives

Adjectives in Sindarin usually come after the noun they modify—the opposite of English word order.

barad dūr “dark tower”

ered luin “blue mountains”

Soft Mutation of Adjectives

Adjectives often undergo soft mutation of their first consonant when following a noun.

In many cases, the adjective isn’t mutated. This can happen in a few different situations:

- The adjective is being emphasized, perhaps to show a contrast. (“no, no, the *blue* mountains!”)
- Mutating the adjective would result in a sequence of consonants that’s hard to pronounce. *Barad-dūr* sounds more natural than *Barad-dhūr*.
- Mutation would create an ambiguity that couldn’t be resolved by looking at the context. For instance, *i berian vell* could mean either “the strong hobbit” or “the dear hobbit”, since *bell* “strong” and *mell* “dear” both become *vell* under soft mutation. Because of this, it might not always be obvious what *i berian vell* is supposed to mean, so you have the option of avoiding the mutation and saying *i berian mell* or *i berian bell* instead.

Word Order

Sometimes adjectives can be placed before the noun. Often this is done to preserve the meter or rhyme scheme of a poem.

When an adjective comes before a noun that’s also modified by the article *i*, the adjective comes after the *i*. Because of this, the soft mutation from *i* affects the adjective instead of the noun.

“the green jewel” = *i vîr calen* / *i vîr galen* / *i galen mîr*

Plural Adjectives

When a noun is plural, any adjectives that modify it must be pluralized as well. This may seem strange to English speakers, but pluralizing adjectives is fairly common in real-world languages; if you've studied a Romance language it will seem very familiar.

Sindarin adjectives are pluralized using the same vowel mutation that nouns are subject to.

When the singular and plural forms of a noun are the same, sometimes the adjective is the only way to tell that the noun is plural at all!

mîr galen “a green jewel” → *mîr gelin* “green jewels”

Adjectives in Sentences

Now we know how to say “the blue sky” (*i venel luin*), but what if we're trying to say “the sky is blue?”

The word for “is” or “to be” in Sindarin is omitted from most types of sentences where it would be used in English. That means we have to rely on word order to convey meaning instead.

To say “the sky is blue”, the adjective gets moved to the beginning of the sentence: *luin i venel*.

Maer i aes hen “This food is good”

A subtler way to express the same thing is to move the adjective to the end of the sentence and not soft-mutate it.

I aes maer “The food is good”

i aes vaer “the good food”

However, this might be a bit *too* subtle if the first consonant of the adjective wouldn't even be changed by soft mutation!

I venel fanui “the cloud-white sky” / “The sky is cloudy”

Multiple Adjectives

When multiple adjectives modify a noun, they're separated by *ah* "and", which is usually shortened to *a* before a consonant.

cuil air ah alfirin "a lonely and immortal life"

Plurals

In English, the normal way to pluralize a noun is to add *-s*: one *cat*, two *cats*. A few nouns use some kind of vowel shift instead: one *man*, two *men*, one *goose*, two *geese*.

In Sindarin, vowel changes are the normal way of forming plurals. Fortunately, the patterns are quite regular and predictable once you learn the rules.

You'll often see this particular type of vowel change referred to as "I-affection" or "I-mutation".

The Vowel *A*

A changes to *AI* when it's the last vowel in the word, and to *E* elsewhere.

adan ~ "a human"
edain ~ "humans"
aran ~ "a king"
erain ~ "kings"
balan ~ "a Vala"
belain ~ "Valar"
galadh ~ "a tree"
_____ ~ "trees"
barad ~ "a tower"
_____ ~ "towers"
lavan ~ "an animal"
_____ ~ "animals"

The Vowel *E*

E changes to *I* when it's the last vowel in the word. When it's *not* the last vowel, it doesn't change.

edhel ~ "an elf"
edhil ~ "elves"

eneth ~ “a name”

enith ~ “names”

henneth ~ “a window”

_____ ~ “windows”

meleth ~ “a love”

_____ ~ “loves”

feleg ~ “cave, mine, underground dwelling”

_____ ~ “underground dwellings”

When an *E* next to an *I* changes to *I*, the two *Is* merge into a single *I*.

eirien ~ “daisy”

eirin ~ “daisies”

firieth ~ “mortal woman”

_____ ~ “mortal women”

The Vowel *I*

I doesn't change at all.

lind ~ “song”

lind ~ “songs”

ethir ~ “river mouth”

ethir ~ “river mouths”

híril ~ “lady”

híril ~ “ladies”

hîth ~ “mist”

_____ ~ “mists”

gwinig ~ “little one, baby”

_____ ~ “little ones”

The Vowel *O*

O changes to *Y* when it's the last vowel in the word, and to *E* elsewhere.

orod ~ “mountain”

eryd ~ “mountains”
onod ~ “ent”
enyd ~ “ents”
coron ~ “globe, ball”
ceryn ~ “globes”
gorog ~ “horror”
 _____ ~ “horrors”
nogod ~ “dwarf”
 _____ ~ “dwarves”

When an *O* that is changing to *Y* is after an *I*, the *I* merges with it to create *ÿ*.

firion ~ “mortal man”
firyñ ~ “mortal men”
ion ~ “son”
yñ ~ “sons”

The Vowel *U*

U changes to *Y*.

curu ~ “a skill”
cyry ~ “skills”
urug ~ “an orc, a monster”
yryg ~ “monsters”
guldur ~ “sorcery”
 _____ ~ “sorceries”

The Vowel *Y*

Y doesn’t change in the plural.

mÿl ~ “gull”
mÿl ~ “gulls”
heryn ~ “lady”
heryn ~ “ladies”

Long (Accented) Vowels

A long (i.e. accented) *Ū* or *Ú* changes to *UI* in the plural.

<i>amrûn</i>	~ “a sunrise”
<i>emruîn</i>	~ “sunrises”
<i>annûn</i>	~ “a sunset”
<i>ennuîn</i>	~ “sunsets”
<i>cû</i>	~ “an archer's bow”
<i>cui</i>	~ “bows”
<i>hû</i>	~ “a dog”
_____	~ “dogs”
<i>lhûg</i>	~ “a serpent”
_____	~ “serpents”
<i>dû</i>	~ “night, late evening”
_____	~ “nights”
<i>dúlin</i>	~ “nightingale”
<i>duilin</i>	~ “nightingales”
<i>úan</i>	~ “a monster”
<i>uiain</i>	~ “monsters”
<i>dúath</i>	~ “shadow (as of nightfall)”
_____	~ “shadows”

Accents on other vowels are generally kept when changing to the plural form of a noun. *Á/Â* as the last vowel of a word simply becomes *AI*, same as unaccented *A*.

<i>nêl</i>	~ “a tooth”
<i>nîl</i>	~ “teeth”
<i>hên</i>	~ “a child”
<i>hîn</i>	~ “children”
<i>têw</i>	~ “a letter”
_____	~ “letters”
<i>thêl</i>	~ “a sister”
_____	~ “sisters”
<i>iâth</i>	~ “a fence”
<i>iaith</i>	~ “fences”

<i>bâd</i>	~ “a pathway”
<i>baid</i>	~ “pathways”
<i>fân</i>	~ “a white cloud”
_____	~ “white clouds”
<i>iâ</i>	~ “a chasm”
_____	~ “chasms”
<i>bôr</i>	~ “a vassal, a loyal man”
<i>bÿr</i>	~ “vassals”
<i>dôr</i>	~ “a land, a region”
_____	~ “lands”
<i>lhôn</i>	~ “a noise”
_____	~ “noises”
<i>brôg</i>	~ “a bear”
_____	~ “bears”
<i>môr</i>	~ “darkness, black”
_____	~ “darknesses”
<i>thórod</i>	~ “a torrent”
<i>théryd</i>	~ “torrents”
<i>Nóruí</i>	~ “June”
_____	~ “Junes”

The Diphthong *AU*

AU becomes *OE* in the plural.

<i>naur</i>	~ “a fire”
<i>noer</i>	~ “fires”
<i>naug</i>	~ “a dwarf”
<i>noeg</i>	~ “dwarves”
<i>aur</i>	~ “a day”
_____	~ “days”
<i>draug</i>	~ “wolf”
_____	~ “wolves”
<i>nauth</i>	~ “thought”
_____	~ “thoughts”

Other Diphthongs

The other diphthongs *AE*, *AI*, *OE*, *UI* generally don't change in the plural.

naeth ~ "woe"

naeth ~ "woes"

aeglr ~ "a mountain range"

aeglr ~ "mountain ranges"

gwaith ~ "a fellowship"

gwaith ~ "fellowships"

goe ~ "a terror"

goe ~ "terrors"

duin ~ "a river"

duin ~ "rivers"

All Together Now

orodben ~ "a mountaineer, someone who lives in the mountains"

eredbin ~ "mountaineers"

rammas ~ "a wall"

remmais ~ "walls"

randir ~ "wanderer, pilgrim"

_____ ~ "wanderers"

adar ~ "father"

_____ ~ "fathers"

amon ~ "hill"

_____ ~ "hills"

arphen ~ "knight"

_____ ~ "knights"

arthor ~ "realm"

_____ ~ "realms"

celeth ~ "stream"

_____ ~ "streams"

certh ~ "rune"

_____	~ “runes”
<i>condir</i>	~ “mayor”
_____	~ “mayors”
<i>cýron</i>	~ “new moon”
_____	~ “new moons”
<i>drambor</i>	~ “a fist”
_____	~ “fists”
<i>dess</i>	~ “a young woman”
_____	~ “young women”
<i>elanor</i>	~ “sun-star (a type of flower)”
_____	~ “sun-stars”
<i>emel</i>	~ “mother”

<i>esgal</i>	~ “veil, screen, roof of leaves”
_____	~ “veils”
<i>faloth</i>	~ “ocean wave”
_____	~ “waves”
<i>fileg</i>	~ “small bird”
_____	~ “small birds”
<i>gannel</i>	~ “harp”
_____	~ “harps”
<i>glamog</i>	~ “orc, noisy creature”
_____	~ “orcs”
<i>mallorn</i>	~ “a type of tree with golden leaves”
_____	~ “mallorn-trees”
<i>mellon</i>	~ “a friend”
_____	~ “friends”
<i>minas</i>	~ “citadel”
_____	~ “citadels”
<i>ungol</i>	~ “a spider”
_____	~ “spiders”

Table of Plural Vowel Changes

Original	Nonfinal	Final	Example
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<i>A</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>AI</i>	<i>aran</i> "king" → <i>erain</i> "kings"
<i>E</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>edhel</i> "elf" → <i>edhil</i> "elves"
<i>O</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>Y</i> or <i>E</i>	<i>Onod</i> "Ent" → <i>Enyd</i> "ents"
<i>U</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>curu</i> "skill" → <i>cyry</i> "skills"
<i>Ú/Û</i>	<i>UI</i>	<i>UI</i>	<i>dâ</i> "night" → <i>dui</i> "nights"
<i>AU</i>	<i>OE</i>	<i>OE</i>	<i>naur</i> "fire" → <i>noer</i> "fires"

The Class Plural

In addition to the simple plural to denote more than one of something, Sindarin nouns also have a *class plural* form denoting *all* of that thing (or at least a very large number). In general, the class plural is formed with a suffix *-ath*: *Periannath* "Hobbits" from *perian*; *Sammath* "chambers" from *sam*.

From the examples given above you'll note that the *-ath* suffix can change the final consonant of a word.

O-O plurals

There's a special (and optional) plural form for two-syllable words where both vowels are *O*. Both *Os* may change to *E* in the plural.

Onod "ent" → *Ened* "ents"

Orod "mountain" → *Ered* "mountains"

Plural Suffixes

Singular Suffixes

Irregular Stress

REFERENCE

Tengwar Reference

The Brogan English Mode

The Reeve English Mode

<i>tincotéma</i>		<i>parmatéma</i>		<i>calmatéma</i>		<i>quessetéma</i>	
T	ᵽ	P	ᵽ	C	ᶘ	K	ᶘ
D	ᵽ	B	ᵽ	J	ᶘ	G	ᶘ
TH	ᵽ	F	ᵽ	SH	ᶘ	CH	ᶘ
TH	ᵽ	V	ᵽ	H	ᶘ	GH	ᶘ
N	ᵽ	M	ᵽ	NK	ᶘ	NG	ᶘ
R	ᵽ	W	ᵽ	Y	ᶘ	QU	ᶘ
R	ᵽ	RD	ᵽ	L	ᶘ	LD	ᶘ
S	ᵽ	S	ᵽ	SS	ᶘ	Z	ᶘ
Y	ᵽ	X	ᵽ	W	ᶘ	WH	ᶘ

The Sindarin Mode of Beleriand

The Sindarin Mode of Gondor

Grammar Reference

Mutations

Words With Irregular Consonant Mutation

The following words and prefixes began with NASALIZED STOPS (*MB*, *ND*, *NG*) in Old Sindarin, and mutate irregularly. Words derived from a root or prefix given here also mutate irregularly. E.g. *dagnir* “bane” is irregular because it derives from *dag-* “slay”.

band “prison”

bâr “home”

bardh “home”

bast “bread”

bauglir “tyrant”

baw “howl”

besain “lady”

besoneth “lady”

boe “must”

born “hot”

dae- “dreadful”

dag- “slay”

dan- “back”

dev- “try”

dî “under”

dîr “man”

dôr “land”

dûr “dark”

gal- “shine”

gaur “werewolf”

golodh “sage”

gor “dread”

gorn “revered”

gûl “sorcery”

gur- “death”

Pronouns

Subject Pronouns

Direct Object Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
1 st person	<i>nin</i> “me”	<i>ven</i> “us”
2 nd person	<i>le</i> “you”	<i>le</i> “you”
2 nd p. familiar	<i>gin</i> “yourself”	—
3 rd person	<i>han</i> “him/her/it”, <i>†hon</i> “him”, <i>†hen</i> “her”	<i>hain</i> “them”

Possessive Pronouns

	Singular Possessor	Plural Poss.
1 st person	<i>nîn</i> “my”	<i>vîn, ’wîn</i> “our”
2 nd p. familiar	<i>gîn</i> “your”	<i>lîn</i> “your”
2 nd p. formal	<i>lîn</i> “your”	<i>lîn</i> “your”
3 rd person	<i>dîn</i> “his, her, its, their”	
3 rd p. refl.	<i>în</i> “his/her/their own”	

Nouns and Adjectives

Definite Articles

	Singular	Plural
Plain	<i>i</i> + soft mutation	<i>in</i> + nasal mutation
Possessive	<i>en</i> + mixed mutation	

Verbs

Imperative

A-verbs: change the *-a* to *-o*.

I-verbs: suffix *-o*.

Verb-Noun or Gerund

Other texts often call this form the **GERUND**. A verb-noun/gerund is just a noun that refers to an action: *walking is good exercise*.

A-verbs: suffix *-d*.

I-verbs: suffix *-ed*.

Present Tense

A-verbs: Drop the *-a*, then add a suffix from the table below to indicate the person and number of the subject.

If the subject is a separate word (a pronoun or noun), use the 3rd-person suffixes: *Im lasta* “I hear”, *Mi lastar* “We hear”.

	Singular	Plural
1 st person	- <i>on</i> “I”	- <i>am</i> “We”
2 nd person	- <i>ol</i> “you”	- <i>ol</i> “you”
2 nd p. familiar	- <i>og</i> , †- <i>ach</i> “you”	—
3 rd person	- <i>a</i> “he/she/they/it”	- <i>ar</i> “they”

I-verbs: In the third-person singular, just lengthen the stem-vowel of the verb: *tol-* → *tôl* “he comes”. Otherwise, apply one the affixes from the table below. All of the affixes cause I-affection on the verb: *telin* “I come”.

	Singular	Plural
1 st person	- <i>in</i> “I”	- <i>im</i> “We”
2 nd person	- <i>il</i> “you”	- <i>il</i> “you”
2 nd p. familiar	- <i>ig</i> , †- <i>ich</i> “you”	—
3 rd person	—	- <i>ir</i> “they”