A Uniform System of Tengwar for English

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Abstract
Suggestions for rendering English words using the Tengwar.

Additional Keywords
Tolkien, J.R.R.—Languages—Writing systems

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POETRY CONTEST

Reproduced below is the poem "A Elbereth Gilthoniel" and its word-for-word translation as sent by Professor Tolkien. This is the first translation of the poem ever published. We wish to have a poetic version of the translation for publication in the Astron issue. The Tolkien Society of America will pay five dollars to the member submitting the poetic version which, in the opinion of the judges, best captures the flavor of the original Sindarin, at the same time being reasonably correct, poetic English. The Great Judge will be W.H. Auden, who has consented to give some of his time to this venture. All entries should be received at T.S.A. headquarters by 10 Astron (2 April).

A Elbereth Gilthoniel,
silvren pennu miriel
o manel agiar elenath,
Na-chaered palan-diriel
o galadhremmin ennorath,
Fanuilos, le linnathon
nef ae ar, si nef ae aeron!

O Elbereth Gilthoniel,
glittering...come slanting down...
sparkling like jewels...
from...heaven...glory...
(of) star-host! To-remote
distance...gazing-far...
from...tree-woven...
Middle-Lands, White-Snow,
to you...I will sing...
on-this-side-of...sea, here...
on this side...of great sea!

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A UNIFORM SYSTEM OF TENGWAR FOR ENGLISH
by Cory Seidman

Since my being a linguistics major can be traced to a desire three years ago to improve my use of the Elfl-letters through a knowledge of phonetics, it is natural that my mode of writing should vary constantly with my growing knowledge of phonemics. At present, I am using a modification of the method of Trager and Smith, which is based on the fact that the "long vowels" of English are actually diphthongs. Trager and Smith recognize nine simple vowels, but I find seven sufficient. These are, in phonemic notation, \( i, e, a, o, u, \theta, \alpha \), for which I use the tehtar \( i\), \( j\), \( i\), \( l\), \( n\), \( j\), \( n\). These have the values of the vowels in bit, bet; bat, but; put, bought, pot, which I would write \( p\), \( p\), \( p\), \( p\), \( p\), \( p\), \( p\), \( p\), \( p\), \( p\), \( p\). These are also used in any unstressed syllable: Longbottom.
In order to express diphthongs, I use the semi-vowels \(\mathcal{N}, \mathcal{O}, \mathcal{A}\) and \(\mathcal{U}\), to which I give the values 'r', 'w', 'y', and 'h'.

\(\mathcal{O}\) is used, following Tolkien's practice on the title page, at the ends of words and before consonants, while 'y' appears at the start of a syllable. The different combinations occur in the words beer, bear, burr, bar, bore, written \(\mathcal{W}, \mathcal{O}, \mathcal{A}, \mathcal{Y}\).

\(\mathcal{O}\)' is also the sound in bird, \(\mathcal{O}\), and the unstressed suffix 'er': butter, \(\mathcal{O}\).

\(\mathcal{O}\) and \(\mathcal{A}\) are used to express the "long vowels" and diphthongs iy, ey, ay, ow, aw. The words beat, mate, bite, boot, boat, bout, are written \(\mathcal{W}, \mathcal{Y}, \mathcal{A}, \mathcal{O}, \mathcal{O}, \mathcal{A}, \mathcal{O}, \mathcal{O}\).

Similarly oy in boy, \(\mathcal{O}\) and oy in the Brooklynese pronunciation of bird, \(\mathcal{O}\).

No diphthong with 't' is used regularly in my dialect, at any rate. These diphthongs are more properly called "long vowels" than those just discussed, and are found in the words 'bed' and 'pod' as opposed to 'bat' and 'pot'. However, the difference in length results entirely from the change in consonant, and so need not be indicated. I do have a few specified used for 't'. for instance, I show the distinction of merry, marry, and Mary by writing them \(\mathcal{O}, \mathcal{O}, \mathcal{O}\).

I have not yet thought of any brilliant use for the now partially redundant \(\mathcal{A}, \mathcal{O}, \mathcal{Y}\) and \(\mathcal{O}\). I generally write \(\mathcal{A}\) and \(\mathcal{O}\) for 'y' and 'w' (hug, \(\mathcal{A}, \mathcal{O}\), and white, \(\mathcal{O}, \mathcal{O}\)) and \(\mathcal{A}\) and \(\mathcal{O}\) for 'y' and 'w' after another consonant (beauty, \(\mathcal{A}, \mathcal{O}, \mathcal{A}\), and queen \(\mathcal{O}, \mathcal{O}\), but ymuth, \(\mathcal{A}, \mathcal{O}\), and win, \(\mathcal{O}, \mathcal{O}\)).

I hope this explanation has avoided both obscurity and tediousness and will save other Tolkienists from having to become linguists (thereby limiting competition in my chosen profession).

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The Meeting

"The Tolkien Society of America will have its giant holiday meeting at 8 PM on 27 December/31 Afteryule at the home of the founder and thain, Dick Plotz.

Hopefully Ian Ballantine and Gimli will be there. There may be mushrooms (a hobbit's favorite food). Entertainment by Hobbits, Uninhobblted, Ltd., if you can take it. Also a grand disappearance by the hobbit of your choice.

May the Silmarils ever light your paths."

Giant it was but the giants didn't stop coming at 8. They spoke "friend" and entered for an hour and a half--some 50 or 60 of them. Ian Ballantine was away but W. H. Auden strolled in at about 9:30.

Plenty of everybody's choice hobbits disappeared during the course of the meeting to play pool, do Israeli dances in the dining room, worship the Yule Tree, or play the recorder. After the main body of the meeting (see The New Yorker, January 15) was over, Hobbits, Uninhobblted gave a command performance, featuring "The Orcs' Marching Song" and a couple of terrible voices.

The mushrooms were delicious.