

# Two phonetic “full writing”<sup>1</sup> modes

## A proposition based on material by J. R. R. Tolkien

by “Mach” J. Wust, December 6th 2003

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Full writing’ refers to tengwar modes that represent all vowels by letters, not by *tehtar*, i.e. not by accents or curls placed above or below the letters.

# 1. Introduction

Unfortunately, no published tengwar text allows an unambiguous reconstruction of an entire mode. That’s because of two reasons: Most of the published texts, and after all the shorter ones, don’t suggest any spelling for certain words; and most of the published texts, after all the longer ones, suggest more than one spelling for certain words. This is precisely the point where research starts. If a text doesn’t suggest any spelling, we must search for a sufficiently similar text that does so; if a text suggests more than one spelling, we must search for a reason that explains these different spellings. I’ve done this, and here I’m presenting what I’ve found. Of course, these results of that research can be discussed because they don’t simply represent what Tolkien wrote. Especially in cases where there’s very few evidence, different people might come to different results.

## 2. A proposition based on the *Treebeard Page*

This reconstruction is based mainly on a document that dates from mid 1939:<sup>2</sup> DTS 24, the *Treebeard Page*. Even though this document’s shorter than any of the documents that are written in the *Bombadil* mode, it allows a pretty good reconstruction, since it shows every vowel tengwa distinguished in the *Bombadil* mode. For the sounds that aren’t attested in DTS 24, I’ve assumed that they’re represented the same way as in the *Bombadil* mode.

Note that the red signs in the following charts are the ones that aren’t attested.

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<sup>2</sup> cf. RS p. 382.

Consonants based on the *Treebeard Page*

|                      | I                                | II                     | III                     | IV                   |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ᵽ<br>/t/ toss<br>ᵽᵽᵽ             | ᵽ<br>/p/ pool<br>ᵽᵽᵽ   | ᵽ<br>/tʃ/ chase<br>ᵽᵽᵽ  | ᵽ<br>/k/ coat<br>ᵽᵽᵽ |
| sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ᵽ<br>/d/ deep<br>ᵽᵽᵽ             | ᵽ<br>/b/ but<br>ᵽᵽᵽ    | ᵽ<br>/dʒ/ joy<br>ᵽᵽᵽ    | ᵽ<br>/g/ go<br>ᵽᵽᵽ   |
| sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ᵽ<br>/θ/ throne<br>ᵽᵽᵽ           | ᵽ<br>/f/ fellow<br>ᵽᵽᵽ | ᵽ<br>/ʃ/ shy<br>ᵽᵽᵽ     | ᵽ<br>/x/ loch<br>ᵽᵽᵽ |
| sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ᵽ<br>/ð/ there<br>ᵽᵽᵽ            | ᵽ<br>/v/ vole<br>ᵽᵽᵽ   | ᵽ<br>/ʒ/ measure<br>ᵽᵽᵽ |                      |
| sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ᵽ<br>/n/ now<br>ᵽᵽᵽ              | ᵽ<br>/m/ meter<br>ᵽᵽᵽ  |                         | ᵽ<br>/ŋ/ hang<br>ᵽᵽᵽ |
| sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ᵽ<br>(note 1)<br>/r/ hair<br>ᵽᵽᵽ | ᵽ<br>/w/ was<br>ᵽᵽᵽ    | ᵽ<br>(vowel)            | ᵽ<br>(vowel)         |

|                      |                                   |                                  |                                      |                    |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ᵽ<br>(note 1)<br>/r/ rainy<br>ᵽᵽᵽ | ᵽ<br>/b/ lead<br>ᵽᵽᵽ             | ᵽ<br>/s/ said<br>ᵽᵽᵽ                 | ᵽ<br>/z/ is<br>ᵽᵽᵽ |
| sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ᵽ<br>/h/ house<br>ᵽᵽᵽ             | ᵽ<br>(note 3)<br>/ʌ/ what<br>ᵽᵽᵽ | ᵽ<br>(note 2, 4)<br>/j/ young<br>ᵽᵽᵽ | ᵽ<br>(vowel)       |
| sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ᵽ<br>(vowel)                      | ᵽ<br>(vowel)                     | ᵽ<br>(vowel)                         |                    |

## Notes to the consonant letters:

note 1: *Rómen* γ is used for *r* if there’s a following vowel, *óre* ρ if there’s a preceding vowel. If the *r* is between two vowels, two cases must be distinguished: (a) words like *merry* **mcγi**, *sorry* **6cγi** where *rómen* γ alone is used because the preceding vowel isn’t affected by the *r* (it’s the cases where Traditional Spelling usually has two *rr*); (b) words like *weary* **մինγի**, *touring* **բօնγիւ** where a combination of *óre* ρ and *rómen* γ is used because the preceding vowel is affected by the *r* (the vowels that are affected by a following *r* are given below in the chart on p. 6 in the lines with “+ *óre*”).<sup>3</sup>

If a word ends with *óre* ρ and the next begins with a vowel, then a *rómen* γ is added after the *óre* ρ, e.g. *wander in* **մտնոյ իմ**, *here of need* **լինց լն ունիմ**. If the first word is unstressed *or*, *are*, then *óre* should be dropped, e.g. *for hours* **բօց ւն**, *are at my call* **սց սր մս զո՛ւ**.

note 2: The letters for /w, j/ aren’t used but initially, since other instances of these sounds are expressed by *tehtar* (see below).

note 3: This sign should be used even by these who don’t distinguish *which* from *witch*.

note 4: Other full writing modes use the long carrier ǂ for this sound. On the *Treebeard Page*, however, the long carrier seems to be but a variant of the short carrier ǁ. The use of *yanta* λ for /j/ is attested in *Ilbereth’s Greetings* (DTS 22)<sup>4</sup> in the word *you*: **լօ**

<sup>3</sup> For some speakers, however, the words *weary*, *touring* may be represented more adequately like this: **մինցի**, **բօնցիւ**.

<sup>4</sup> FCL “1937”.



**Vowels based on the *Treebeard Page***

I’ve not indicated the vowel values, but only given an example word. Most of these words are the vowel “key words” used by Charles W. Kreidler (Kreidler 1997, pp. 70 – 79).

|                  |                      | ɪ                                    | e                         | ɘ                               | ɑ                           | o                                | ɒ                          |
|------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| simple           | sign<br>sound<br>ex. | <b>ɪ</b> (note 1, 2)<br>chick<br>ɟɪɟ | <b>e</b><br>step<br>ʒpɛp  | <b>ɘ</b> (note 3)<br>bat<br>pɘp | <b>ɑ</b><br>lock<br>ɟɑɟ     | <b>o</b> (note 4)<br>foot<br>bop | <b>ɒ</b><br>better<br>pɛpɒ |
| andaith          | sign<br>sound<br>ex. | <b>í</b><br>tree*<br>pɟí             |                           | <b>ú</b><br>spa*<br>ʒpú         | <b>á</b><br>law*<br>ɟá      | <b>ó</b><br>true<br>pɟó          | <b>ɒ́</b><br>fur<br>bɒ́    |
| + y              | sign<br>sound<br>ex. |                                      | <b>ë</b><br>day<br>pɛë    | <b>ü</b><br>tie<br>pü           | <b>ä</b><br>toy*<br>pä      |                                  |                            |
| + w              | sign<br>sound<br>ex. |                                      |                           | <b>ǖ</b><br>now<br>pǖ         | <b>ǟ</b><br>toe<br>pǟ     |                                  |                            |
| + óre            | sign<br>sound<br>ex. | <b>ɪɒ</b><br>ear<br>ɪɒ               | <b>eɒ</b><br>chair<br>ɟeɒ | <b>ɘɒ</b><br>star<br>ʒpɘɒ       | <b>ɑɒ</b><br>war<br>ɟɑɒ     | <b>oɒ</b><br>tour<br>pɒɒ         |                            |
| + y<br>+ óre     | sign<br>sound<br>ex. |                                      |                           | <b>üɒ</b><br>fire<br>büɒ        |                             |                                  |                            |
| + w<br>+ óre     | sign<br>sound<br>ex. |                                      |                           | <b>ǖɒ</b><br>sour<br>ʒǖɒ      | <b>ǟɒ</b><br>door*<br>pǟɒ |                                  |                            |
| short<br>carrier | sign<br>sound<br>ex. | <b>íɪ</b><br>real<br>ɟíɪ             | <b>eɪ</b><br>jazz*<br>ɟeɪ |                                 |                             |                                  |                            |

Vowel signs that don’t fit in the chart:

|       |                   |                      |
|-------|-------------------|----------------------|
| sign  | <b>u</b> (note 3) | <b>j</b> (note 2, 5) |
| sound | nut*              | sofa                 |
| ex.   | <b>nuɾ</b>        | <b>sofa</b>          |

Notes to the vowels:

note 1: The same sign is also used for final weak *-i*, as in *heavy, pretty*: **lebi**, **pyri**

note 2: Make sure to distinguish **j** from **i**.

note 3: Make sure to distinguish **u** from **u**. As in the *Bombadil* mode, **u** might be transcribed with a point above **u̇**, in order to guarantee the distinction.

note 4: The same sign is also used for final weak *-u*, as in *value, issue*: **buco**, **ido**

note 5: This sign **j** is also used word-initially. It’s forms a part of the word even if Traditional Spelling would require a separation as in *a sign, a moment*: **joon**, **joon**

\* Some general remarks to the vowels:

I recommend to transcribe only the vowels that you actually distinguish in speech. See also below “Some Thoughts on How to Spell Words”. This means e.g.:<sup>6</sup>

**á** If you rhyme *father* with *bother*, you shouldn’t use **á** but only **o**.

**ó** If you rhyme *caught* with *cot*, you shouldn’t use **ó** but only **o**.

**ï** If you rhyme *peak* with *pick*, you shouldn’t use **ï** but only **i**.

**ö** If you rhyme *toy* with *tie*, you shouldn’t use **ö** but only **ä**.

**ō** If you rhyme *hoarse* with *horse*, you shouldn’t use **ō** but only **o**, except for words like *lower* ‘make low’ (only if your *lower* doesn’t rhyme with *lore* or *lower* ‘threaten’).

**ɔ** If you rhyme *can* ‘to put into cans’ with *can* ‘to be able to do something’, you shouldn’t use **ɔ** but only **u**, except for words like *yeah* (only if your *yeah* doesn’t rhyme with *spa*).

<sup>6</sup> Note that this isn’t a complete list of all possible vowel mergers. I just hope that the most important differences between American and British English are covered.

u If you rhyme *luck* with *look*, you shouldn’t use u but only D.

### 3. A proposition based on the *Bombadil* mode

This reconstruction is based on four documents that most probably date from the early Thirties:<sup>7</sup> DTS 16, 17, 18, and 23.<sup>8</sup> I’ve chosen the name according to the longest of these (and of all known tengwar texts), DTS 18, which transcribes the beginning of the poem *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*. The vast material provided by these four documents allows a fair reconstruction of that mode, after all since they exemplify almost every sound of Received Pronunciation, a dialect that exemplifies almost every sound distinguished in any English dialect.

This mode is better attested as the mode exemplified in the *Treebeard Page*, but the *Treebeard Page* mode is later and closer to the description of the tengwar in Appendix E of *The Lord of the Rings*. That’s why I’ve chosen to give more prominence to the *Treebeard Page* mode.

#### Consonants based on the *Bombadil* mode

The *Bombadil* mode uses the same consonant letters as the *Treebeard Page* mode, with the two following exceptions:

|   |     |     |      |
|---|-----|-----|------|
| 𐌵 | /w/ | 𐌵𐌶𐌵 | was  |
| 𐌶 | /w/ | 𐌶𐌶𐌵 | what |

#### Abbreviations and *tehtar* based on the *Bombadil* mode

The *Bombadil* mode uses the same abbreviations and *tehtar* as the *Treebeard Page* mode, except for the two abbreviations for *of* 𐌶 and *of the* 𐌶 that aren’t used in the *Bombadil* mode.

<sup>7</sup> cf. LB p. 151; L 133; RS V Note on Tom Bombadil.

<sup>8</sup> cf. P 48; LB p. 299.



## Vowels based on the *Bombadil* mode

I’ve not indicated the vowel values, but only given an example word. Most of these words are the vowel “key words” used by Charles W. Kreidler (Kreidler 1997, pp. 70 – 79).

|                             |                      | ɪ                          | ɛ                   | ɑ                         | o                  | ɒ                         |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| simple                      | sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ɪ (note 1)<br>chick<br>ɟɪɟ | ɛ<br>step<br>ʃɛɛɛ   | ɑ (note 2)<br>bat<br>pɑɑɾ | o<br>lock<br>ʈoɟ   | ɒ (note 3)<br>look<br>ʈɒɟ |
| <i>andaith</i>              | sign<br>sound<br>ex. |                            |                     | á<br>spa*<br>ʃpá          | ó<br>law*<br>ʈó    |                           |
| following y                 | sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ï<br>tree*<br>ɾɟï          | ë<br>day<br>ɾɛë     | ä<br>tie<br>ɾä            | ö<br>toy*<br>ɾö    |                           |
| following w                 | sign<br>sound<br>ex. |                            |                     | ā<br>now<br>mā            | ō<br>toe<br>pō     | ɔ̄<br>true<br>ɾɟɔ̄        |
| + <i>óre</i>                | sign<br>sound<br>ex. | ɪɾ<br>ear<br>ɪɾ            | ɛɾ<br>chair<br>ɟɛɾ  | ɑɾ<br>star<br>ʃɾɑɾ        | oɾ<br>war<br>ʂoɾ   | ɒɾ<br>tour<br>ɾɒɾ         |
| following y<br>+ <i>óre</i> | sign<br>sound<br>ex. |                            |                     | äɾ<br>fire<br>bäɾ         |                    |                           |
| following w<br>+ <i>óre</i> | sign<br>sound<br>ex. |                            |                     | āɾ<br>sour<br>ʃāɾ         | ōɾ<br>door*<br>pōɾ |                           |
| short carrier               | sign<br>sound<br>ex. | í<br>real<br>ɟíɾ           | ɛɪ<br>jazz*<br>ɟɛɪɟ |                           |                    |                           |



- ɔ** If you rhyme *can* ‘to put into cans’ with *can* ‘to be able to do something’, you shouldn’t use **ɔ** but only **ɑ̇**, except for words like *yeah* (only if your *yeah* doesn’t rhyme with *spa*).
- ʊ** If you rhyme *luck* with *look*, you shouldn’t use **ʊ** but only **ɯ**.

## 4. Some thoughts on how to spell words

The phonetic English modes I’m proposing here have two aims: They should be consistent with the attested samples of phonetic modes by J.R.R. Tolkien, and their use (in both writing and reading) should be as easy as possible for anybody who speaks English.

English pronunciation varies from region to region and from speaker to speaker. In order to allow any variety of English to be written in this mode, most of the differences in pronunciation aren’t represented but for a few very specific exceptions. For those who know about the difference between phonology (phonemics) and phonetics: Grosso modo, this mode represents the English phonemes.

### Pronunciation differences that should not be represented

Most of the variation in English pronunciation is of the following kind: A specific vowel sound is pronounced one way by some people but another way by others. Take as an example for this second kind of variation the different pronunciations of the vowel sound found in the word *bite*: For most speakers, it has a composed vowel, but in the southern part of the United States, it has a pure vowel similar to the one of the word *spa*, but more forwarded towards the vowel of the word *bad*. Among those that have a compound vowel in *bite* there are many who pronounce its first element with a vowel halfway between the vowel of *spa* and the vowel of *bad*; but in Canadian English, the first element rather corresponds to the vowel of *bird*; in the north of England, to the vowel of *bad*; in Cockney and in New York City, to the vowel of *spa*.<sup>10</sup>

Do these different representations have to be represented with different signs? No they don’t, because all these different pronunciations can be referred to in one and the same sign with the meaning ‘any pronunciation the vowel of *bite* can have’. For the transcription into the mode based on the *Treebeard Page* as proposed here, this sign is *anna* with two points above **ä̇**.

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<sup>10</sup> According to Johnson/Roca (1999), p. 196.

Now someone who pronounces the word *bite* with a pure vowel might consider this sign **ċ** not to be adequate because it's composed by a sign for *a* **č** and a sign for the following *y* **·**. So the sign **ċ** supposed to represent any pronunciation of the vowel in *bite* points to a specific pronunciation. That's something we have to accept if we want to use the attested sign **ċ** and if we don't want to multiply the spellings.

After all, what would be the benefit of having different spellings of say the vowel in *bite*? Dialectological research could benefit (but who would need tengwar for that purpose?), and spelling might fit better with intuition for certain speakers, but every particular dialect of English would require a particular tengwar mode and since most vowel sounds have different pronunciations, the spelling of most words would be affected. So the mutual understanding would be complicated a lot. However, I'm trying to propose a mode that any speaker of English can use and understand, so I've chosen to represent any pronunciation of the vowel in *bite* with the same sign **ċ**.

## **Pronunciation differences that should be represented**

There's only two specific kinds of variation that I suggest to be represented. The first isn't worth much talking: It's where certain words are pronounced one way by some people but another way by others. These cases are few and many of them are well-known, e.g. the words *either*, *can't* that are not pronounced the same way in England and in the United States.

The second case is more important: It's where some speakers distinguish two vowels that are not distinguished by others. If you make the distinction, you should represent it in tengwar; if you don't, you shouldn't. This idea is from the book “Describing Spoken English” by Charles W. Kreidler.<sup>11</sup> Two attested examples: In J. R. R. Tolkien's pronunciation,<sup>12</sup> the vowels that occur in the words *horse*, *torment* weren't distinguished from those in *hoarse*, *door*. In tengwar, this distinction isn't found either, cf. *torment* in DTS 23 and *door* in DTS 25. However, he distinguished the vowels occurring in the words *cot*, *what* from those in *caught*, *water* as well in his pronunciation as in tengwar, cf. *what*, *caught*, *water* in DTS 18.

Now why do I recommend to represent this kind of variation but not the other kind described above? On one hand, it's because of practical reasons of writing: Who among these that don't distinguish between the first vowels of *father* - *bother* (a well-attested distinction in J. R. R. Tolkien's phonetic English tengwar texts) would be able to distinguish these vowels in a tengwar transcription? Even if some could, they'd be very likely to make mistakes. On the other hand, this

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<sup>11</sup> cf. Kreidler (1997), chapter 5.

<sup>12</sup> Assuming that he used Received Pronunciation, cf. Krieg (1978), p. 156, and consider that he was professor in Oxford.

doesn't affect many sounds. So even if a reader is expecting some distinctions that aren't made in the text he's reading, it's quite unlikely that he'll misunderstand that text because most of the word will be written the way he'd write them. (If you know possible reasonable misunderstandings, please tell me, I'd love to know such examples! Perhaps there could be one when the words *luck*, *look* aren't distinguished, but I couldn't find any.)

Be aware that only the variation in vowel pronunciation should be transcribed, not the variation in consonant pronunciation. Thus where some speakers don't distinguish two consonants in their pronunciation, they should distinguish them in tengwar nonetheless. This can be done quite easily because consonant distinctions are reflected in the Traditional English Spelling, while vowel distinctions often aren't. Again examples from Tolkien: In his pronunciation, he didn't distinguish the initial consonant in the words *which*, *whither* from the one in *witch*, *weather*, but nonetheless, he distinguished them in *whither*, *weather* in DTS 18. He didn't pronounce any /r/ in the words such as *spar*, *art* so that the *ar* in these words couldn't be distinguished by pronunciation from the *a* in *spa*, *path*, but nonetheless, he made that distinction by writing the word *arts* with the r-tengwa *óre* **᠋** but *path* without (both in DTS 23).

In order to show what distinctions should be represented, I've made notes like the following on **ú**: “If you rhyme *father* with *bother*, you shouldn't use **ú** but only **᠋**”.

## 5. References and other acknowledgements

Many thanks to Chris McKay.

The tengwar fonts I've used are *TengwarSindarin.ttf* and *TengwarSindarinAlt.ttf* (version 1.9e) from Dan Smith.

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## 6. Author

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