

A phonetic *tehtar*¹ mode

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

by “Mach” J. Wust, December 27th 2003

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¹ A *tehta* mode is a mode where the vowels aren't represented by letters, but by *tehtar*, i.e. 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 little evidence, different people might come to different results.

2. A proposition based on the *tehtar* modes

This proposition is mainly based on the phonetic *tehtar* modes I know of (there might be more), four documents that date from the Sixties: DTS 39,² DTS 41,³ a document reported by Arden R. Smith,⁴ and DTS 58.⁵ These documents show only isolated words or short phrases. They lack the signs for some vowels that are distinguished in the *Bombadil* mode, but for the most part, the lacking vowel signs are well-attested in other *tehtar* modes, e.g. in the Sindarin mode of DTS 49,⁶ in the Quenya mode of DTS 19⁷ or in the orthographical English modes of DTS 5, DTS 10, and in the *Endorion Dedication* reported by D. Daniel Andriës.⁸ However, this proposition is still very speculative.

I've marked the signs in red that don't appear in the four mentioned documents of phonetic *tehtar* modes.

² cf. AI p. 188.

³ cf. AI p. 190.

⁴ cf. A. Smith in: *elfscript* 1875, 1884, and in a personal post reproduced below in the appendix.

⁵ cf. http://search.sothebys.com/jsps/live/lot/LotDetail.jsp?lot_id=34NDT

⁶ cf. SD p. 131.

⁷ cf. R jacket front.

⁸ cf. D. Andriës in: *elfscript* 2424, 2498.

Consonants based on the *tehtar* modes

	I	II	III	IV
sign sound ex.	Ṗ /t/ toss Ṗṗ	Ṗ /p/ pool ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /tʃ/ chase ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /k/ coat ṖṖṚ
sign sound ex.	Ṗ /d/ deep ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /b/ but ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /dʒ/ joy ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /g/ go ṖṖṚ
sign sound ex.	Ṗ /θ/ thrown ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /f/ fellow ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /ʃ/ shy ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /x/ loch ṖṖṚ
sign sound ex.	Ṗ /ð/ there ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /v/ value ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /z/ measure ṖṖṚ	
sign sound ex.	Ṗ /n/ now ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /m/ meet ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /ny/ canyon ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /ŋ/ hang ṖṖṚ
sign sound ex.	Ṗ (note a) /r/ here ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /w/ was ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /y/ young ṖṖṚ	

Additional letters:

sign sound ex.	Ṗ (note a) /r/ rainy ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /l/ lead ṖṖṚ	Ṗ (note b) /s/ said ṖṖṚ	Ṗ (note b) /s/ us ṖṖṚ
sign sound ex.	Ṗ (note b) /z/ ease ṖṖṚ	Ṗ (note b) /z/ is ṖṖṚ	Ṗ /h/ house ṖṖṚ	Ṗ (note c) /ʌ/ what ṖṖṚ
sign sound ex.	Ṗ (short carrier)	Ṗ (long carrier)	Ṗ /ə/ real ṖṖṚ	

Notes to the consonant chart:

(a): Before vowels, *r* is represented by *rómen* **ʁ**; after vowels, by *óre* **ɹ**. Where the *r* is between two vowels, two cases must be distinguished: (a) words like *merry* **ɹʁj**, *sorry* **ʁʁj** where *rómen* **ʁ** 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* **ɹʁj**, *touring* **ʁʁj** where a combination of *óre* **ɹ** and *rómen* **ʁ** 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*).⁹

If a word ends with *óre* **ɹ** and the next begins with a vowel, then a *rómen* **ʁ** is added after the *óre* **ɹ**, e.g. *wander in*, *here of need*:

ɹʁɹɹɹ ɹɹ , ɹʁj ɹɹ ɹɹjɹ

Óre is dropped if the first word is unstressed *or*, *are*, e.g. *for hours*, *are at my call*:

ɹʁ ɹɹ , ʁ ɹ ɹɹ ɹjɹ

(b): *Silme* and *áre* are only used if no vowel *tehta* is placed on them, e.g. in *sea*, *zoo*, *trouser*, *peace*:

ʁj , ʁj , ɹɹɹɹ , ɹjɹ


If there's a vowel *tehta*, then *silme nuquerna* and *áre nuquerna* are used, e.g. in *this*, *message*, *busy*:


ɹɹ , ɹʁj , ɹjɹ


(c): This sign should be used even by these who don't distinguish *which* from *witch*.


⁹ Some speakers may find the following representation of words like e.g. *weary*, *touring* more adequate: **ɹjɹ**, **ʁjɹ**.

Abbreviations and consonant *tehtar* based on the *tehtar* modes


 This sign, extended *anto*, is used for the word *the*.

 This sign, extended *ampa*, is used for the word *of*.


 This sign, extended *ampa* with a bar below, is used for *of the*.

¹⁰ A bar above indicates that the letter is preceded by a nasal of the same series, e.g. *Seventeen*, *under*:


ᄀᄀᄀᄀᄀᄀ, ᄀᄀᄀ

 A following consonantal *y* is expressed by two points below, e.g. in *perfumed*, *cute*, *rebellious*:

ᄀᄀᄀᄀᄀᄀ, ᄀᄀᄀ, ᄀᄀᄀᄀᄀᄀᄀ

 A following *w* is expressed by a modified left-curl below, e.g. in *between*, *quiet*:

ᄀᄀᄀᄀᄀᄀ, ᄀᄀᄀᄀᄀ

 An ending *-s* is most of the times expressed by an attached hook. It's only used where the *s* is a proper ending, not where it belongs to the stem of the word, this means it's not used in words such as *his*, *house*, but only in words such as *knows*, *pools*, *Tom's*.

¹⁰ As the *tehtar* need to accompany another letter, I've chosen any letter and marked it blue.

Vowel *tehtar* based on the *tehtar* modes

The vowel *tehtar* are placed on the following letter. Where no letter follows, they’re placed on the short carrier. 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).

tehtar		·	ˊ	ˋ	ˆ	ˊ	ˋ	ˆ	ˊ
simple	sign sound ex.	j chick ʧq̇	í step ʃṗṗ		í lock ʧq̇	í foot ḃṗ	j (a) nut ṅṗ	j bat ṗṗ	j (b) sofa ʃḃḃ
on a long carrier	sign sound ex.	j (c) tree* ṗɣj		í spa* ʃṗj	í (d) law* ʧj	j (d, e) true ṗɣj			
on <i>anna</i>	sign sound ex.		á day ṗá	á tie ṗá	á toy* ṗá				
on <i>vala</i>	sign sound ex.			á now ṅá	á toe ṗá				
on <i>óre</i>	sign sound ex.	ó ear ṅ	ó chair ɣṅ	ó star ʃṗṅ	ó war ṅ	ó tour ṗṅ	ó fur ḃṅ		
on <i>anna + óre</i>	sign sound ex.			á fire ḃá					
on <i>vala + óre</i>	sign sound ex.			á sour ʃṅ	á door* ṗṅ				
on stemless <i>calma</i>	sign sound ex.	é real ɣʧ	é jazz* ɣʧ						

Notes to the vowel chart:

- (a): The same sign is also used for initial schwa, while final and medial schwa are represented with a point below. Traditional Spelling might separate the initial schwa as a word on its own. Examples: *again, a game, gladiolus*:¹¹

ə̇n , ə̇m , ə̇ɡlɑ̇diolʊs

- (b): This sign is used for medial and final schwa, while initial schwa is represented with **ɪ**, e.g. *a gondola, America, nationalist*:

ə̇ɡɒnɒlə , ə̇mɛrɪkə , nɑ̇ʃənəlɪst

Note that the point below's not used to mark syllabic consonants such as in: *little, wooden, draggeled, welcome, moment, better*:

lɪtəl , wɒdə , dræɡed , wɛləkəm , məmənt , bettə

- (c): The same sign is also used for final weak *-i*, as in *heavy, pretty*: **ɪ** , **ɪ**

- (d): Instead of **ɪ** , **ɪ** you can use **ɪ̇** , **ɪ̇** e.g. *law, true*: **ɪ̇** , **ɪ̇** as well as **ɪ** , **ɪ**.

- (e): The same sign is also used for final weak *-u*, as in *value, issue*: **ʊ̇** , **ʊ̇**

* Some general remarks:

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.:¹²

ɪ̇ If you rhyme *luck* with *look*, you shouldn't use **ɪ̇** but for initial schwa (see above note).

ɪ If you rhyme *peak* with *pick*, you shouldn't use **ɪ** but for final weak *-i* (see above note).

ɪ̇ If you rhyme *father* with *bother*, you shouldn't use **ɪ̇** but only **ɪ̇**.

ɪ If you rhyme *caught* with *cot*, you shouldn't use **ɪ** but only **ɪ̇**.

ʊ̇ If you rhyme *toy* with *tie*, you shouldn't use **ʊ̇** but only **ʊ̇**.

¹¹ Actually, this is the suggestion I'm least sure about. I could also imagine that initial schwa would be represented by a simple short carrier **ɪ** or by a *tehta* for the vowel of *bat*, or by a short carrier with a point below.

¹² Note that this isn't a complete list of all possible vowel mergers, though I think that the most important differences between the standard pronunciations of Britain and the U.S. are covered.

- ŏ̂ If you rhyme *hoarse* with *horse*, you shouldn't use ŏ̂ but only ŏ̂̂, except for words like *lower* 'make low' (only if your *lower* doesn't rhyme with *lore* or *lower* 'threaten').
- ĉ If you rhyme *can* 'to put into cans' with *can* 'to be able to do something', you shouldn't use ĉ but only ĵ̂, except for words like *yeah* (only if your *yeah* doesn't rhyme with *spa*).

3. Some thoughts on how to spell words

The phonetic English mode I'm proposing here has two aims: It should be consistent with the attested samples of phonetic modes by J.R.R. Tolkien, and its 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*.¹³

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 *tehtar* mode proposed here, this sign is *anna* with three points above *ā̂̂̂*.

¹³ According to Johnson/Roca (1999), p. 196.

Now someone who pronounces the word *bite* with a pure vowel might consider this sign $\dot{\text{c}}$ not to be adequate because it's composed by a sign for $a^{\dot{}}$ and a sign for the following y c . So the sign $\dot{\text{c}}$ 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 $\dot{\text{c}}$ 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 $\dot{\text{c}}$.

Pronunciation differences that should be represented

There's only two specific kinds of variation that I suggest to be represented. There's not much to say about the first: 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.¹⁴ Two attested examples: In J. R. R. Tolkien's pronunciation,¹⁵ 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

¹⁴ cf. Kreidler (1997), chapter 5.

¹⁵ 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 **ĵ**:
"If you rhyme *father* with *bother*, you shouldn't use **ĵ** but only **ĵ̂**".

4. 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.

AI: Christina Scull/Wayne G. Hammond (1995): *J. R. R. Tolkien. Artist & Illustrator*. London: Harper Collins.

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Andriës, D. Daniel: elfscript 2498: Re: Help with some words...**᠋**August 22nd,**᠋**2003. See: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/elfscript/message/2498>

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<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/elfscript/message/1875>

Smith, Arden R.: elfscript 1884: Re: odd tehta in DTS 41, [March 15th, 2003](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/elfscript/message/1884), see:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/elfscript/message/1884>

5. Author

This document has been written by "Mach Hezan" J. Wust on December 27th of 2003. Its only intention is to spread the knowledge on tengwar. If you have comments, you may contact me at:

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6. Appendix

Arden R. Smith sent me the following post on october 21th of 2003 (I've slightly edited the post so that it fits into the lines):

Dear Mach,

You wrote:

>I suppose your statement that we normally see this sound
>represented by óre with a subscript dot refers to other unpublished
>writing, right?

Not exclusively. I was also thinking of such published texts as the Book of Mazarbul (in Pictures) and the draft of the Moria-gate inscription at VI:450.

>The mentioned document seems to show a phonemical mode, because it
>represents the "er" sound with a grave accent and not with the
>vowel tehtar that correspond to Traditional Spelling. Nonetheless,
>you write that there's a sign for 'silent e'. Am I right that
>this is not the 'silent e' or Traditional Spelling but rather a
>'silent e' before syllabic consonants (e.g. in errAntry, womAn,
>little, woodEn, welcOme, momEnt, RonAld)?

The document in question deals with a mixture of phonemic and orthographic representations. Where "silent e" is mentioned, it is in fact the purely orthographic creature that is normally referred to as "silent e". The words with silent e that Tolkien uses as examples are bore and bored.

Yours,

Arden

--

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Perilme metto aimaktur perperienta.

--Elvish proverb
