

Introduction

To write in Elvish or to write using Tengwar?

When one visit Internet sites devoted to Tolkien and his invented languages, diverse types of inscriptions can be seen, not only using Tengwar but Latin characters, and these inscriptions are supposed to be written in Quenya, Sindarin, English, etc. This sounds confusing and at first it is difficult to realize what is it about. I make some comments here with the objective of clarifying the things a little bit to the newbies.

To write in Elvish using the Latin alphabet:

One can find a text written in Elvish (either in Quenya or Sindarin) by Tolkien himself or by others and what one normally see is a text written using Latin characters and not Tengwar characters. This is in fact a transliteration of Elvish, not Elvish itself. That is to say, the text using Latin characters is phonetically correct, (if certain pronunciation rules of Latin characters defined by Tolkien are used), but this is not the way Elrond or Galadriel had write the text since they had used Tengwar. A clear example of a transliteration is the one used for the Japanese trademarks as Suzuki or Kawasaki: they are written using Latin characters following certain pronunciation rules (in this case those of English), reproducing the same sound as in Japanese. Japanesees write these words with their own characters.

Tolkien gave precise instructions for the way to build a transliteration of Elvish using Latin characters and how it should be pronounced, which can be found in the appendices of LOTR.

To write Elvish using Tengwar:

This should be the most obvious case, since Tengwar alphabet is the natural support for Quenya and Sindarin (also of Black Speech). Tolkien wrote several documents of this type, some of which are among the DTS. A clear information about the phonetic values of Tengwar characters can be found in the excellent introductory document about the use of Tengwar written by Daniel Smith. Here it should be mentioned that an additional complication arises: the phonetic values of Tengwar characters are different for each language (see Dan's document). This can be managed by defining the so-called modes. That is to say, a different chart of the phonetic values of the Tengwar according to the used mode (i.e. the Arda language you want to use): Quenya mode, Sindarin Tengwar/Tehtar mode, Sindarin Beleriand mode (non-Tehtar), Black Speech mode. It should be finally pointed out that the different ways cannot only differ in the pronunciation of the characters but some of them can include additional characters.

To write in English and Old English (Anglo-Saxon) using Tengwar:

Conversely, Tolkien liked to use Tengwar to write modern and old English. In this case the following modes exist: Tengwar/Tehtar English mode, Beleriand mode of English (doesn't use Tehtar), Old English (Anglo-Saxon) mode.

To write other languages using Tengwar:

If Tolkien did it with English, it is not strange that many people want to write something in its own language using the Tengwar. This originated the definition of modes for many languages. It is clear that they are only proposals. In the case of

Spanish, a proposal exists for the Castilian mode developed by the Instituto Lingüístico Lambenor.

Tattoo and inscriptions (once and for all ...):

Many fans want to be tattooed or to write using Tengwar characters in (wedding!) rings and other objects. The question that they always ask in the forums is: how a certain sentence can be written using Tengwar. Most of them are not aware that not the desired alphabet should (Tengwar in this case), but also the language to use in order to be able to define completely the writing. The same thing happens when Latin characters are used, for example: *"I love you"* (Castilian), *"Ich liebe dich"* (German), *"I love you"* (English), they are three inscriptions that mean the same thing, all of them use the Latin alphabet, but they are written in different languages.

It is not the same thing to write a sentence in language Quenya using Tengwar as if one want to write it in English also using Tengwar: it will be written completely different and it will also be pronounced completely different, although it means exactly the same thing. Who wants to be tattooed or to write something using Tengwar should have this in mind before it is too late. I am sorry if this advice came too late for some of you...

Characters and glyphs

At this point it is convenient to define some terms.

Character

A character is the minimum unit of the written language, a part of the alphabet, a symbol, and as such it is unique. Example of character: the capital letter A of the Latin alphabet.

Any graphic representation having the same meaning represents the same character, for example:



All the symbols above represent the character A.

Notice that sometimes the same graphic symbol (for example a certain graphic representation of the letter A) can represent different characters as in the case of the Latin character A, the Cyrillic character A and the character Greek Alpha.

Glyph

The basic element of the font, an image that is printed. All glyphs are unique, even if they represent the same character. Glyphs are used to represent characters. A glyph is unique in its style and form, however, the same character can be represented by different glyphs. Example of glyphs: the graphic representation assigned to the Latin capital character A in the font Times New Roman, regular style.

Font

An organized collection of glyphs and font header information. Usually glyphs that are united in a font have some similarities in design and other properties. A font is scalable, so that it is not to be related to a specific size of the glyphs. Formerly a font was also related to a specific size, since it was not scalable.

Tengwar Alphabet and Tengwar Elfica Font

As it has been said above, the characters of an alphabet are unique, but the glyphs representing them are not, having particular styles characterizing to the different fonts.

The selected style for Tengwar Elfica is the one suggested in the Tengwar alphabet appeared in the mentioned Appendix E of LOTR. It should be noted that this style is not the only one that Tolkien used for the Tengwar. Other styles can be found in the writings of Tolkien (see DTS documents). According to the concepts given before, it can be said that Tolkien represented the Tengwar using different glyphs, drawn by hand, sometimes having very different styles and sometimes very similar ones. In the process of distinguishing which is the basic form of a character starting from a certain sample (a given glyph) is complicated, since sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between the basic form of the character and the form of a serif.

What I am trying to say is that Tolkien represented the characters of the Tengwar alphabet in the Appendix E through the use of certain glyphs characterized by a certain style. This style is not perfectly defined in the sample. The style of the glyphs of a computer font requires nevertheless the precise definition in the forms and it represents more detail than the one you can get from a sample written by hand. For this reason Tengwar Elfica is not a copy of the style used in this sample, but rather inspired by it, being the style of Elfica a very particular and absolutely subjective interpretation of the sample. It was very clear when I was the object of hard criticism (not constructive in fact) after requesting the opinion of the members of the forum Elfscript about the form of the glyphs of the first "beta" version from the font. Fortunately most of them were expressions of encouragement, which I wish to thank a lot.

Finally I want to note that in the mentioned Appendix E appear 36 Tengwar characters and that the font version 1.0 contained 215 characters (now it contains more!). The reason is that other characters there exist further characters in Tolkien writings not represented there, as well as a long list of accents, bars, curls and tildes that have been included in the font. This topic is treated in more detail in section 4.