

LANGUAGE COURSE

Tolkien's Languages

The languages of Middle-earth: Quenya and Sindarin, their sounds and scripts, names, the other tongues, and the history behind Tolkien's invented words.

10 Chapters | Philip Osztromok | Generated with Claude

TOLKIEN'S LANGUAGES

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Tolkien's Languages

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · A Philologist's World

Most readers meet Middle-earth as a story: a ring, a quest, a war. This course starts from the other end. J. R. R. Tolkien invented languages, and the story grew around them. By the end of this chapter you will know who he was as a scholar, why a professor of old languages made new ones, what is and is not known about those languages, and you will have read your first two Elvish phrases.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> Tolkien was a **philologist**, a scholar of how languages are built and how they change. His languages are not a decoration added to a fantasy. He spent most of his life on them, and said the stories were made to give the languages a world.

Who Tolkien Was

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892–1973) was an English scholar of language and literature at the University of Oxford. His field was **philology**: the study of old texts and of how words and sounds change over time. He worked mainly on Old English, the language of *Beowulf*, and on the medieval languages around it. He is known to the world as the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, but that came second to his working life as a professor.

This matters because philology is exactly the skill needed to invent a language that feels real. A philologist knows that words do not appear from nowhere: they come from older words, and sounds change in regular ways. Tolkien built his languages the same way, as families with ancestors, cousins and histories.

Why Invent a Language?

Tolkien began inventing languages as a young man, around 1910 or 1911 while at school in Birmingham. His first Elvish tongue was an early form he later called *Qenya*, which became **Quenya**. He said that he invented languages for the pleasure of it. In a lecture he called *A Secret Vice*, given in the early 1930s, he spoke openly about the private hobby of making languages, long before the idea was common.

The most famous claim about his motive is that the stories followed the languages. In a letter of 1955 he wrote, in words close to these, that the stories were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the other way round. A language needs speakers, and speakers need a history, so he wrote the history.

MOST FANTASY WRITERS	TOLKIEN
Write the story, then invent a few names	Build the languages, then write the story that suits them
Names are labels	Names have meanings that can be taken apart
A fan language is added later, if at all	The languages are the source of the world
Little history behind the words	Each language has ancestors and sound changes

The Two Main Languages

Out of all the languages Tolkien invented, two are developed far enough to learn. Both are Elvish, and they are very different in sound.

	QUENYA	SINDARIN
Story role	High-elven; used for lore, ceremony and song	Everyday speech of the grey-elves
Real-world inspiration	Strongly Finnish in sound and structure, with some Latin and Greek	Welsh in sound and some grammar
Feel	Smooth, rich in vowels and endings	Clipped, with consonant mutations
Example phrase	*Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo*	*Mae govannen*

Your First Two Phrases

```
# Quenya: the greeting Frodo uses in the story
Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo
  a star shines on the hour of our meeting

# Sindarin: the greeting of Elves meeting a friend
```

```
Mae govannen
  well met
```

You do not need to understand the grammar yet. Notice only how different they look: the first has long words with endings, the second is short and sharp. That difference is the subject of Chapters 5 and 6.

What Exists, and What Does Not

An invented language is only as large as what its author wrote. Tolkien published only a fraction of his language work. Most of it survives as notes, word lists and drafts, which scholars have edited and published in journals such as *Parma Eldalamberon* and *Vinyar Tengwar* since his death. Two things follow:

- **The vocabulary is limited.** You cannot say anything you like in Elvish. Where Tolkien gave no word, a fan must invent one, and that is an addition, not Tolkien.
- **The forms changed over time.** Tolkien kept revising. A word from 1915 may differ from one of 1955. Careful learners check which period a form comes from.

WATCH OUT: "ELVISH" IS NOT ONE LANGUAGE

The word "Elvish" covers a family. Quenya and Sindarin are different languages, related as, say, Latin and French are. A phrase from one will not work in the other.

WATCH OUT: FAN FORMS ARE NOT TOLKIEN'S

Websites and tattoos often use words that Tolkien never wrote. When this course gives a form, it names whether Tolkien published it or whether it is built by rule from his grammar.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Tolkien invented Elvish for the films."** He worked on it for decades before *The Lord of the Rings* appeared (1954–55); the film makers worked from his published material.
- **"Elvish is a complete language you can speak fluently."** It is partial. Quenya and Sindarin have enough to write short sentences, not a full everyday vocabulary.

- **"Sindarin is a simpler Quenya."** They are two separate languages with different sounds and grammar.

Where This Course Goes

The ten chapters cover the family of languages, how to say them aloud, how they are written, a first look at Quenya and Sindarin grammar, how to read the names in the books, the languages of Dwarves, Orcs and Men, the history behind the words, and what people do with Elvish today. For the general idea of a constructed language and how Tolkien compares with others, see *Constructed Languages* 6. For the basic ideas of sounds and grammar, see *Introduction to Linguistics*.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

In your own words, explain what a philologist is and why Tolkien's job as one helps explain how his languages work. Give two features of a language that a philologist would care about.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Compare Quenya and Sindarin in a small table: their roles in the story, their real-world inspirations, and one example phrase each. Say which of the two you would expect to have long words with many endings.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

A friend wants an Elvish phrase for a tattoo and finds one on a website. List three questions you would ask before trusting it, using what this chapter said about what exists and what does not.

View solution

CHAPTER 1 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Tolkien (1892–1973):** Oxford philologist; wrote the stories partly to give his languages a world
- **Philology:** the study of old texts and of how languages change over time
- **Quenya:** high-elven, inspired by Finnish; **Sindarin:** grey-elven, inspired by Welsh
- Phrases: *Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo* (Quenya, "a star shines on the hour of our meeting"); *Mae govannen* (Sindarin, "well met")
- Limits: a partial vocabulary, edited from notes and drafts; forms change between periods
- Always ask: did Tolkien publish this form, or was it built by rule?

COMING NEXT

Tolkien's Languages, Chapter 2 maps the whole family of languages in Middle-earth: Quenya, Sindarin and their relatives, and the tongues of Dwarves, Orcs and Men.

Tolkien's Languages

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · The Family of Languages

In Chapter 1 you met two languages, Quenya and Sindarin. This chapter shows how they fit into a larger map: the other Elvish tongues, the language of Men, Dwarves and Orcs, and the way the books present them to the reader. Real language families have a shape, and Tolkien gave his the same shape.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> Tolkien did not invent a bag of unrelated languages. He invented *families*: languages with a common ancestor that split apart as their speakers moved and separated, just as Latin split into French, Spanish and Italian.

The Elvish Family Tree

In the story, all Elves once spoke one tongue at their awakening. As they set out on a long journey westward, and some stopped or turned back, the language divided. Reading downward in the tree below is reading forward in time.

```
Primitive Quendian          the tongue of all Elves at their awakening
│
├── Avarin                  the Avari, who never set out on the journey
│
└── Common Eldarin          the tongue of the Elves on the long march
    ├── Quenya              the Vanyar and the Noldor
    ├── Telerin             the Teleri who reached the far west
    ├── Sindarin            the grey-elves of Beleriand
    └── Nandorin            the Nandor, who turned back on the way
```

The tree is a simplification. The sources list more than a dozen Elvish languages and dialects, and some later merged or borrowed from one another. The point is the pattern: one ancestor, then branches.

Who Spoke What

GROUP OF ELVES	LANGUAGE	NOTE
Vanyar	*Quenya* (their daily form, *Quendya*)	The first of the Elves to reach the West
Noldor	*Quenya* (in exile, *Exilic Quenya*)	The learned Elves; their speech drifted apart from the Vanyar's
Teleri	*Telerin*	Close enough to Quenya to be called a dialect of it
Sindar	*Sindarin*	Grey-elven; the everyday Elvish of Middle-earth in the Third Age
Nandor	*Nandorin*	Several related languages
Avari	*Avarin*	At least six languages; little is known of them

So when the books say an Elf "spoke in the high tongue", they mean Quenya, kept alive for song and ceremony as Latin was in medieval Europe, and when Elves speak among themselves in the wild they speak Sindarin.

Beyond the Elves

LANGUAGE	SPEAKERS	STATUS
Westron (the Common Speech)	Nearly all peoples of the west, apart from Elves	The everyday language of the story, shown to the reader as English
Adûnaic	Men of Númenor	Meant as the older source of Westron; only fragments
Khuzdul	Dwarves	Kept secret from outsiders; a handful of words
Black Speech	Orcs, by Sauron's command	Mostly a few words and the verse on the Ring
Valarin	The Valar	Said to be the ancestor of the world's languages; barely any words
Entish	The Ents	Described as long and sonorous; not written down
Rohirric	The people of Rohan	Shown in the book as Old English

The Translation Trick

Tolkien presents *The Lord of the Rings* as a translation from an old book. The Common Speech is therefore written as English, and the speech of Rohan is written as Old English, so the reader feels the two peoples are related as English speakers are to their own ancestors. The place names of Rohan are Old English words, and the Shire's names are modern English. This device, which Chapter 8 returns to, is why you read most of Middle-earth without ever seeing its real languages.

WATCH OUT: "ELVISH" AND "THE COMMON TONGUE" ARE DIFFERENT

When a character speaks in English in the books, the story means Westron. When Elves sing or speak Quenya or Sindarin, the text leaves the words as they are, and that is where the learnable Elvish lives.

WATCH OUT: THE TREE IS THE STORY'S, NOT A PERFECT FIT FOR THE MANUSCRIPTS

Tolkien changed the history of his Elvish languages many times over his life. The tree above is a safe summary, but a particular name may appear in one period of his writing and be replaced in another.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Quenya and Sindarin are dialects of each other."** They are separate languages, related through a distant ancestor.
- **"All the Elves speak Sindarin."** Quenya was kept for ceremony and lore; the Noldor and Sindar used both.
- **"Dwarvish and Black Speech have full grammars."** Only small pieces survive.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Draw the Elvish family tree from memory: the ancestor, the branches and the group of Elves who spoke each. Then say which two branches Chapters 5 and 6 of this course cover.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Make a table of the non-Elvish languages in this chapter: who spoke each, and how much of it exists. Then say which one the reader of the books meets most often, and in what disguise.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare the Elvish language family with a real one (for example Latin and the languages that came from it). Name two things the two have in common and one that Tolkien's family has that a real one does not.

View solution

CHAPTER 2 QUICK REFERENCE

- All Elvish descends from **Primitive Quendian**; the march produced **Common Eldarin**, which split into Quenya, Telerin, Sindarin and Nandorin
- Quenya: Vanyar and Noldor; Telerin: Teleri; Sindarin: Sindar; Nandorin: Nandor; Avarin: Avari
- Non-Elvish: **Westron**, **Adûnaic**, **Khuzdul**, **Black Speech**, **Valarin**, **Entish**, **Rohirric**
- Westron is shown as English and Rohirric as Old English: the books are a "translation"
- Only Quenya and Sindarin are developed enough to learn; the rest survive in fragments

COMING NEXT

Tolkien's Languages, Chapter 3 turns to sound: how Quenya and Sindarin are pronounced, the real languages behind them, and how to read an Elvish name aloud.

Tolkien's Languages

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Sounds and Sources

Tolkien cared about how his languages *sounded* more than about almost anything else. He chose the sounds first and let the words follow. This chapter teaches you to read Elvish aloud: the vowels, the consonant spellings that trip up English readers, and the rule that tells you which syllable to stress.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> Both languages are spelled almost as they sound. Learn a handful of spellings (*c*, *th*, *dh*, *ch*, *ae*), one accent mark and one stress rule, and you can pronounce any Elvish word in the books.

Two Sound Models

Tolkien took the sound of Quenya from **Finnish** and the sound of Sindarin from **Welsh**, then built the grammar to match. That is why the two sound so different.

	QUENYA	SINDARIN
Model	Finnish (with some Latin and Greek)	Welsh
Typical feel	Open syllables, many vowels, smooth	Closed syllables, harder consonants, more clusters
Sample	*Valinor, Namárië, Silmaril*	*Mithrandir, Elbereth, Celeborn*

Vowels

Both languages use the five vowels *a e i o u*, pronounced as in Latin and most European languages, not as in English. A long vowel is marked with an **acute accent**: *á é í ó ú*. In Sindarin a long vowel in a one-syllable word takes a **circumflex** instead: *â ê î ô û*.

```
# short and long vowels
a   as in "father" (short)      á   the same, held longer
e   as in "bed"                 é   closer, as in French "été"
i   as in "machine" (short)     í   the same, held longer
```

```
o   as in "pot"                ó   closer, as in Italian "mondo"
u   as in "put"                ú   as in "moon"

# Sindarin one-syllable words use the circumflex
Lhûn  Rhûn  dôr
```

In Quenya the long and short *a*, *i* and *u* have the same quality and differ only in length. Short *e* and *o* are a little more open than their long partners.

Diphthongs

A diphthong is two vowel sounds in one syllable. Quenya has six: *ai, au, eu, oi, ui, iu*. Sindarin has *ai, ei, ui, au* (a final *au* is spelled *aw*), plus *ae* and *oe*, which have no exact English match. Say each as a gliding sound, not as two syllables.

Consonants: The Spellings to Learn

SPELLING	SOUND	WHERE	EXAMPLE
c	always like *k*, never like *s*	both	*Celeborn*
qu	like *kw*	Quenya	*Quenya*
th	as in "thin"	both	*Thingol*
dh	as in "this"	Sindarin	*Caradhras*
ch	the Welsh or Scottish sound in "loch"	Sindarin	as in Welsh *bach*
ng	"ng" at the end of a word; "ng" + "g" elsewhere	Sindarin	a word-final *ng* as in "sing"
rh, lh	breathy, unvoiced *r* and *l*	Sindarin	*Rhûn, Lhûn*
hy	like the *h* in "huge" (a harsh breath on the *y*)	Quenya	a breathy *y* sound
ty, ny	a *t* or *n* followed by *y*; *ny* as in "new"	Quenya	the ending *-nya*

Two traps: the Sindarin *f* at the end of a word sounds like *v* (and is then spelled *ph*), and the letter *i* before a vowel at the start of a Sindarin word is a consonant, like the English *y*.

Stress: Which Syllable?

The rule is the same in both languages and is the rule of Latin. Count from the end of the word.

1. A word of **two syllables** is stressed on the first.
2. In a longer word, look at the next-to-last syllable (the *penult*). If it is **heavy**, stress it.
3. If it is light, stress the one before it (the *antepenult*).

A syllable is **heavy** if it has a long vowel, a diphthong, or ends in a consonant. Otherwise it is light.

```
# CAPITALS mark the stressed syllable (applied by the rule above)
Val-i-nor        penult "i" is light     →  VAL-i-nor
Na-má-ri-ë       penult "ri" light, antepenult "má" long  →  na-MÁ-ri-ë
Mith-ran-dir     penult "ran" is closed (heavy)  →  mith-RAN-dir
El-be-reth       penult "be" is light    →  EL-be-reth
Cel-e-born       penult "e" is light     →  KEL-e-born
```

Compare English, where the stress must be learnt for each word and can change its meaning. In Elvish it is predictable and never changes the meaning.

WATCH OUT: DO NOT READ *C* AS *S*

The letter *c* is always the sound of *k*. English readers say "Seleborn" for *Celeborn* and are wrong in both languages. *Qu* is likewise the sound of *kw*.

WATCH OUT: THE FILM AND THE BOOK MAY DIFFER

The spoken Elvish in the films was recorded by actors and sometimes departs from Tolkien's rules. Use the written rules in this chapter as the standard, and treat film pronunciation as one performance.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Elvish is just English with odd spellings."** The vowels and several consonants follow other languages' rules.
- **"Anything goes for stress."** The Latin-style rule decides it.
- **"The accent mark means a different letter."** It means the same vowel, held longer.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Apply the stress rule to *Legolas* (*Le-go-las*), *Aragorn* (*A-ra-gorn*) and *Silmaril* (*Sil-ma-ril*), and mark the stressed syllable of each. State, for each, whether the penult is heavy or light and why.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Say how you would pronounce each of these Sindarin spellings and compare it with an English approximation: *c* in *Celeborn*, *th* in *Thingol*, *dh* in *Caradhras*, *ch*, *rh* in *Rhûn*.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain in your own words why Quenya and Sindarin sound different from each other, using the real languages Tolkien took as models. Give one feature of the sound of each.

View solution

CHAPTER 3 QUICK REFERENCE

- Quenya models: Finnish; Sindarin models: Welsh
- Vowels *a e i o u* as in Latin; acute accent = long; Sindarin circumflex on one-syllable long vowels
- *c* = k; *qu* = kw; *th* as in "thin"; *dh* as in "this"; *ch* as in "loch"; *rh*, *lh* breathy
- Sindarin final *f* sounds like *v* (spelled *ph*)
- Stress: two syllables → first; longer → penult if heavy, else antepenult. Heavy = long vowel, diphthong, or closed syllable

COMING NEXT

Tolkien's Languages, Chapter 4 covers the written side: the Elvish script Tengwar and the dwarvish runes, with the inscription on the One Ring as a worked example.

Tolkien's Languages

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Tengwar and Cirth

Tolkien did not stop at inventing languages: he invented the ways of writing them. This chapter looks at the two main scripts, the flowing **Tengwar** and the angular runes called **Cirth**, and then reads the most famous inscription in fantasy, the verse on the One Ring, as a lesson in script and language together.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> A script is a system, not a pile of letters. In Tengwar, the *shape* of a letter tells you how the sound is made. That is why it is more than a font: it is a small piece of phonetics.

The Tengwar

In the story, the Elf Fëanor invented the Tengwar in Valinor and first used them for Quenya and Telerin. In real life, Tolkien probably developed the script in the late 1920s or early 1930s. The first sample appeared in print in 1937, and the full explanation came in Appendix E of *The Lord of the Rings* in 1955. It is written left to right.

How the Letters Are Built

Most Tengwar letters are made of a vertical **stem** and one or two **bows**. The shape of the stem and bows is not arbitrary. The letters sit in a table:

- Four **series** (*témar*) that match the *place* in the mouth where a sound is made
- Six **grades** (*tyeller*) that match the *manner* of making it, such as voiced or unvoiced, or stopped or breathy

A learner who knows that *t*, *p* and *k* differ only in place of articulation can see why the three letters look like cousins. This is exactly the system of sounds you studied in *Introduction to Linguistics*, turned into letter shapes.

Vowels Are Marks, Not Letters

In most modes of Tengwar, a vowel is not a letter of its own. It is a small mark, called a **tehta** (plural *tehtar*), placed over the consonant that comes before it. The common marks are:

```
# a tehta sits above a consonant letter
circumflex (^)     =  a
acute (´)          =  e
dot                =  i
left curl          =  o
right curl         =  u
```

A vowel standing alone is drawn on a plain "carrier" letter. The same marks can also show a doubled or nasal consonant, so one stroke can carry several meanings.

Modes

The same letters can be read in different **modes**, because they stand for sounds, not for fixed letters. In the classical Quenya mode the basic signs stand for *t, p, k* and *kw*; in the general mode they stand for *t, p, ch* and *k*. The mode used on the Doors of Durin is called the mode of Beleriand and writes vowels with full letters. A reader must know which mode a text is in.

	THE LATIN ALPHABET	TENGWAR
What a letter stands for	A sound, by custom	A sound, by position in a table of sounds
Vowels	Full letters	Usually marks above the consonant
Related sounds	Unrelated letter shapes (*t, d*)	Related shapes (a stroke added for voicing)
Reading mode	One for each language	Several modes, to fit the language

The Cirth

The **Cirth** (Sindarin for "runes") are angular letters made for carving into wood, stone and metal. In the story, the Sindar of Beleriand made them first, and Daeron, the minstrel of King Thingol, rearranged and expanded them. Dwarves learned the runes at the start of the Second Age, made changes to the sound values and adapted them for their own language. The Moria version is called *Angerthas Moria*. After leaving Moria, Dwarves settled in Erebor and adapted the runes again to write Westron, which is the version used in the Book of Mazarbul.

Like Tengwar, the Cirth are systematic. Adding a stroke to a branch adds voicing, and moving a branch changes the manner of the sound. Tolkien also modelled the history of the Cirth on the real history of the Anglo-Saxon runes, which changed shape as they passed between peoples.

The runes in *The Hobbit* are an adaptation of the Old English runes, used to spell, not to give new letters.

Reading the Ring

The verse on the One Ring is written in Tengwar and the language is the Black Speech. It is the one text in the books that combines the two.

```
# Black Speech, as printed in the book, with word-by-word meanings
Ash nazg durbatulûk,        One ring to rule them all,
ash nazg gimbatul,          one ring to find them,
ash nazg thrakatulûk,       one ring to bring them all
agh burzum-ishi krimpatul.   and in the darkness bind them.

# the parts
ash       one            nazg       ring
agh       and            burzum     darkness     -ishi  in
durbatulûk   to rule them all
gimbatul     to find them
```

Notice that the phrases *ash nazg* "one ring" repeat three times and that the verbs share a stem ending in *-tul*. This is a typical piece of Tolkien's craft: a short, memorable text built from a small set of reusable parts.

WATCH OUT: "ELVISH WRITING" DOES NOT MEAN "ELVISH LANGUAGE"

Tengwar can write English, as the "Hobbit-style" pages in the books show, and the Ring's Tengwar write the Black Speech. A script and a language are two separate things.

WATCH OUT: TENGWAR IS NOT A STANDARD FONT

Computers do not include Tengwar by default. It is not part of the official Unicode standard but lives in an unofficial registry, and different fonts disagree about the order of the letters.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Tengwar letters are the English alphabet in disguise."** They are built on a table of sounds, not on the English letters.
- **"The Ring is written in Elvish."** The script is Elvish; the language is the Black Speech.

- **"Runes are the Dwarves' own invention."** In the story the Sindar made them; Dwarves adapted them.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain in your own words how Tengwar letters are organised (series and grades) and what is gained by building letters this way. Give the five common vowel marks and the vowels they stand for.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Break down the line *ash nazg gimbatul* into words, give the meaning of each part from the table above, and say what repeats across the four lines of the verse.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare the Tengwar and the Cirth: who made each in the story, what each was for, how each is built, and one way each differs from the Latin alphabet.

View solution

CHAPTER 4 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Tengwar:** flowing script, left to right; four series (place) by six grades (manner)
- Vowel marks (*tehtar*): circumflex a, acute e, dot i, left curl o, right curl u
- Several **modes**: the same letters read for different languages
- **Cirth:** angular runes for carving; made by the Sindar, adapted by Dwarves (*Angerthas Moria*, *Angerthas Erebor*)

- Ring verse: Tengwar script, Black Speech language; *ash nazg* "one ring"

COMING NEXT

Tolkien's Languages, Chapter 5 is the first look at Quenya itself: its nouns, its cases and its verbs, and what a Quenya sentence looks like.

Tolkien's Languages

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Quenya at a Glance

This chapter is a sketch, not a full grammar: just enough Quenya to see how the language is built and to read a sentence with understanding. The full treatment belongs to the planned Quenya Grammar 1 course. What you will take away is the shape: words carry *endings* where English uses small words.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> Quenya is built from a stem plus endings. The endings say how many, whose, where, and who is doing it. One long Quenya word can do the work of a whole English phrase.

Nouns

Plural

The plural depends on how the word ends. This is the "first" plural, used for a general group.

```
# ends in a consonant:  + -i
atan   man          atani    men

# ends in a vowel:  + -r
elda   an elf       eldar    elves

# ends in -ë:  -ë becomes -i
aiwë   bird         aiwi     birds
```

A second plural, *-li*, means "many" or a partial group. Quenya also has a dual for pairs, which we will not use here.

"The" and "a"

Quenya has a word for "the", *i*, and no word for "a". An unmarked noun is indefinite, and one-of-a-kind things such as the sky need no article.

```
i atan        the man
elda           an elf
menel          the sky
```

Cases: Endings That Do the Work of Small Words

Quenya has about ten cases, which are endings for a noun's job in the sentence. These are the ones to meet first:

ENDING	JOB	EXAMPLE
-o	genitive: "of"	*anga* "iron" → *ango* "of iron"; *mindon* "tower" → *mindono* "of a tower"
-va	possessive: roughly "'s"	owner and thing owned
-sse	locative: "at, in" (rest)	where something is
-nna	allative: "to" (movement toward)	where it goes
-llo	ablative: "from" (movement away)	where it comes from

The place endings come from Finnish, which has the same idea: where English says "in the house" or "to the house", Finnish and Quenya add a case ending to the noun.

Adjectives

Adjectives can come before or after the noun and agree in number with it. Common endings are *-a* or *-ë*, with a plural in *-ë*, *-i* or *-ië*. An adjective can also stand for a noun: *vinya* "new" gives *vinyar* "news".

Verbs

Two Present Tenses

Quenya separates what is always or habitually true (the **aorist**) from what is happening now (the **present**), a distinction English handles with the word "-ing".

```
# aorist: timeless or habitual
norë          runs
lorin         I sleep            (the vowel changes to i before the ending)

# present: lengthen the vowel and add -a
nóra          is running
lóran         I am sleeping
```

Who Is Doing It: Subject Suffixes

The person is shown by an ending on the verb, so Quenya mostly needs no separate pronoun.

```
tirin  /  tirinyë      I watch
tíralyë                you are watching
samis                  he/she has

# a plural subject takes -r on the verb
orcor matir aiwi        orcs eat birds
```

My, Your, His: Possessive Suffixes

The same idea works on nouns: *-nya* "my", *-lya* "your", *-rya* "his or her", with a linking vowel where needed. So *elen* "star" gives *eleninya* "my star", and *macil* "sword" gives *macilya* "his or her sword".

"To Be"

The verb "to be" is *ná*. With a long ending it shortens to *na-*, as in *nanyë turca* "I am strong" and *nalyë linquë* "you are wet". With a noun, Quenya often omits it: *i elda turca* "the elf [is] strong".

Reading a Whole Sentence

The basic order is subject, verb, object. Here is the Quenya greeting from Chapter 1, taken apart.

```
Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo

elen         star
síla         shines             (the timeless form of the verb sil-)
lúmenn'      to the hour        (lúme "hour" + the allative -nna)
```

```
omentielvo   of our meeting      (omentie "meeting" + -lva "our" + the genitive -o)

a star shines on the hour of our meeting
```

Count what the endings do: the allative says "on the hour", the possessive says "our", and the genitive says "of". English needs five small words for what Quenya puts inside two. Early printings of the book have a slightly different form of "our" (*omentielmo*), a reminder that the text itself was revised.

WATCH OUT: THIS IS THE LATE QUENYA OF TOLKIEN'S LATER NOTES

Quenya changed over fifty years of Tolkien's work. The forms in this chapter follow the standard late form used by modern introductions. Earlier writings use different endings, so mixing sources can produce forms Tolkien never wrote.

WATCH OUT: DO NOT TRANSLATE WORD FOR WORD

A Quenya word with endings can hold what is several English words. Always break a word into stem and endings before translating, as in the greeting above.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Quenya has a word for every English word."** The vocabulary is limited (Chapter 1).
- **"The subject pronoun is always needed."** A suffix on the verb shows the person.
- **"Elvish plurals add -s."** They are *-i*, *-r* or *-li*, depending on the word.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Give the plural of *atan* "man", *elda* "elf" and *aiwë* "bird", and say which rule applies to each. Then say what *ango* and *mindono* mean and what the ending does.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Translate *lorin*, *lóran*, *tíralyë*, *samis* and *orcor matir aiwi*. Explain the difference between *lorin* and *lóran*, and say which part of each form shows the person.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Break *Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo* into stems and endings, and explain what each ending does. Then say what you would expect *macilya* to mean, and why.

View solution

CHAPTER 5 QUICK REFERENCE

- Plural: consonant + *-i*, vowel + *-r*, *-ë* → *-i*; "the" = *i*, no "a"
- Cases: genitive *-o*, possessive *-va*, locative *-sse*, allative *-nna*, ablative *-llo*
- Verb: aorist (*norë*, *lorin*) and present (*nóra*, *lóran*); person ending *-n* I, *-lyë* you, *-s* he/she
- Possessives: *-nya* my, *-lya* your, *-rya* his/her
- "To be": *ná*, often omitted; order: subject, verb, object

COMING NEXT

Tolkien's Languages, Chapter 6 turns to Sindarin: how its consonants mutate, how it makes plurals by changing vowels, and why it sounds so different from Quenya.

Tolkien's Languages

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Sindarin at a Glance

Chapter 5 showed Quenya as a language of endings. Sindarin works differently. It changes the *start* of words, changes vowels *inside* them, and keeps its endings short. This chapter is a sketch, as the last was; the full treatment belongs to the planned Sindarin Grammar 1 course.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> Quenya adds to the end of a word. Sindarin bends the word: the first consonant softens after certain words, and the vowel inside changes to make a plural. This is the Welsh model from Chapter 3 at work in the grammar.

Quenya and Sindarin Side by Side

	QUENYA	SINDARIN
Plural of "man"	*atan* → *atani* (ending added)	*adan* → *edain* (vowel changed)
Roles of nouns	Case endings	Little case; small words and mutation instead
Start of a word	Stays the same	Changes (mutates) after some words
"The"	*i*	*i* (and it triggers a mutation)
Verb person	Suffix (*-n*, *-lyë*, *-s*)	Suffix (*-n* I, *-g* you, *-r* they)

Mutation: The First Letter Changes

A Sindarin word may begin with a different consonant depending on the word before it. The original form is the *radical*; the changed forms are **mutations**. Welsh does the same, and so do Irish and Scottish Gaelic. The source describes three kinds, **soft**, **hard** and **nasal**, and gives this table:

```
# radical  →  soft  /  hard  /  nasal
t   →   d    /  th  /  th
p   →   b    /  ph  /  ph
```

```
c   →   g    /  ch  /  ch
d   →   dh   /  d   /  n
g   →   '    /  g   /  ng

# the soft mutation after "i" (the): gwath "shadow"
gwath            →    i 'wath          the shadow
```

The soft mutation happens when the preceding word ends in a vowel, as with the article *i*. The hard mutation follows a word ending in a plosive, and the nasal follows a nasal. The exact triggers were never fully settled by Tolkien, and scholars disagree on the details.

Plurals by Vowel Change

Most Sindarin plurals do not add an ending. They change a vowel in the word, a process called **i-affection**. English does the same in "man → men" and "foot → feet".

```
adan       man          →   edain       men
orch       orc          →   yrch        orcs
galadh     tree         →   gelaidh     trees

# some short nouns add -in instead
drû        (wild man)   →   drúin
```

A second plural, the **collective**, uses an ending such as *-ath* or *-rim*: *elenath* "all the stars", *Nogothrim* "the race of the Dwarves".

Verbs

A Sindarin verb is a stem plus endings, as in Quenya, but the forms are different.

```
# stem gir-  "to shudder"
giri         infinitive        add -i
girin        I shudder         -i + the ending -n (I)
girir        they shudder      -i + the ending -r (they)
giro!        shudder!          imperative: add -o
```

```
giritham     they will shudder  future: add -tha
girithon     I will shudder
```

The pronoun endings are short: *-n* "I" (excluding you), *-m* "we" (including you), *-g* "you" (informal), *-dh* "you" (formal), *-r* "they". The past tense is complicated and poorly attested; one ending is *-ant* in *teithant* "made marks, wrote", which Tolkien compared to Medieval Welsh.

Pronouns Join Prepositions

As in Welsh, a pronoun can fuse with the preposition before it: *annin* "for me" and *inni* "to us". A possessive can sit on a noun as an ending: *lamm* "tongue" becomes *lammen* "my tongue".

Reading a Greeting

The greeting from Chapter 1, *Mae govannen*, is built from a word meaning "well" and a past participle of a verb of meeting, and is usually translated "well met". The form depends on the grammar of Tolkien's later notes; treat its parts as taken from the standard analysis, not from this chapter's tables.

WATCH OUT: THE SOURCES DO NOT AGREE ON ALL DETAILS

Sindarin was never described in one finished grammar. The table of mutations above is from one source, and other scholars propose a longer one. The past tense is poorly attested. Use these forms to read, not to write confident new sentences.

WATCH OUT: DO NOT APPLY QUENYA ENDINGS TO SINDARIN

The two languages share story but not grammar. Adding Quenya's *-r* or *-i* to a Sindarin word, or the reverse, produces a form neither language has.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Sindarin is Quenya in a simpler form."** The two have different sound systems and different ways of building words.
- **"The first letter of a word never changes."** In Sindarin it often does.
- **"Plurals always add a letter."** Most change a vowel inside the word.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Give the plural of *adan*, *orch* and *galadh*. Say what kind of change makes each plural and compare it with the English "man → men".

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Using the mutation table, give the soft mutation of *t*, *p*, *c* and *d*. Then apply it to *gwath* after *i*, and say what the result means.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

From the verb forms of *gir-*, work out what *girin*, *girir* and *giro!* mean and name the ending that shows the person or mood in each. Then say two things that make Sindarin grammar unlike Quenya's.

View solution

CHAPTER 6 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Mutation:** the first consonant of a word changes after some words (soft, hard, nasal): *gwath* → *i 'wath*
- **Plural:** mostly by vowel change (*adan* → *edain*); collective endings *-ath*, *-rim*
- "The" = *i*
- Verbs: infinitive *-i*, present *-i* + person ending (*-n* I, *-g* you, *-r* they), imperative *-o*, future *-tha*
- Pronouns fuse with prepositions: *annin* "for me"
- Differs from Quenya: bends words instead of adding endings

COMING NEXT

Tolkien's Languages, Chapter 7 uses both languages on the names in the books: how to take apart *Rivendell*, *Galadriel* and *Lothlórien* and what they mean.

Tolkien's Languages

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Names and Places

Almost everyone who has read Middle-earth has met more Elvish in its names than anywhere else. This chapter gives you a method for taking a name apart, shows it working on five well-known names, and explains why the same place can have an Elvish name and an English one.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> A Tolkien name is not a label but a short sentence in a language. Find the language, split the name into its parts, then look each part up. The meaning usually follows.

A Method for Reading a Name

1. **Which language?** The sound tells you (Chapter 3): *dh*, *ch*, *ae* and closed syllables point to Sindarin; open syllables, *qu*, *ty* and *hy* point to Quenya.
2. **Split into parts.** Most names are two elements joined, like *Mith-randir*.
3. **Look each part up.** Tolkien's own notes, the appendices of *The Lord of the Rings* and a dictionary such as Eldamo or Parf Edhellen give the meaning.
4. **Check for mutation.** In Sindarin the first letter of the second part may be softened (Chapter 6), so a part can look different from its dictionary form.

Worked Examples

NAME	LANGUAGE	PARTS	MEANING
Mithrandir	Sindarin	*mith* "grey" + *randir* "wanderer, pilgrim"	Grey Pilgrim: Gandalf's Elvish name
Imladris	Sindarin	*imlad* "deep valley" + *ris* "cleft"	deep, cloven valley (*Rivendell* in English)
Legolas	Sindarin (Silvan form)	*laeg* "green" + *golas* "foliage"	green foliage (from the Sindarin *Laegolas*)
Lothlórien	Sindarin	*loth* "flower" + *Lórien*	disputed: "Dreamflower" or "Lórien of the blossom"

NAME	LANGUAGE	PARTS	MEANING
Galadriel	Sindarin	the sources checked give no breakdown	check a dictionary: not settled here

```
# two parts, two languages' habits visible
Mithrandir          grey + pilgrim        the name given to Gandalf
Imladris            deep valley + cleft   the valley in the cleft of a hill
Laeggolas → Legolas  green + foliage          the vowel change comes from the Silvan dia
```

The stress of these names follows the rule of Chapter 3. The pronunciation given for *Galadriel* in the source is *ga-LA-dri-el*, with the stress on the second syllable, which is exactly what the rule predicts for a word whose next-to-last syllable *dri* is light.

The Same Place, Two Names

Tolkien presents the books as translated from the old Common Speech (Chapter 2). He therefore **translated** the names of places in the Shire and its neighbourhood. *Rivendell* is an English *calque* of *Imladris*, both meaning "deep valley". A calque is a word-for-word translation of a name into another language, the way English "skyscraper" has Spanish *rascacielos*.

IN THE BOOKS	ORIGINAL	WHY TWO NAMES
Rivendell	*Imladris* (Sindarin)	The English is a translation of the Elvish
Gandalf	*Mithrandir* (Sindarin)	The Elves call him by a Sindarin name; others use another
Lórien	*Lothlórien*	A short and a long form of the same name

WATCH OUT: DO NOT GUESS A MEANING FROM THE SOUND

Fan sites list meanings for every name, often wrongly or with no source. A meaning counts when it traces to Tolkien's published or edited notes. Where sources disagree, as for *Lothlórien*, say so.

WATCH OUT: NAMES CAN CHANGE OVER TOLKIEN'S CAREER

A name's meaning and even its language can change between drafts. A gloss from one decade is not automatically right for another.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Every name has one fixed meaning."** Several have more than one proposal.
- **"All Elvish names are Sindarin."** Many in the books are Quenya, and some are mixed.
- **"Rivendell is a place Tolkien invented from nothing."** It is the English form of *Imladris*, and the translation is part of the book's fiction.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Split *Mithrandir* and *Imladris* into parts, give the meaning of each part, and state the language. Explain what the English name *Rivendell* is and why it exists.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain the difference between *Legolas* and *Laegolas* and why a name can have two forms. Then apply the four-step method to a name of your own choice from the books and say which step you could not complete.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

A friend says that *Lothlórien* definitely means "dream-flower". Using this chapter, explain whether that is certain, and what you would check to settle it.

View solution

CHAPTER 7 QUICK REFERENCE

- Method: find the language, split the name, look up each part, watch for mutation
- *Mithrandir* = grey + pilgrim; *Imladris* = deep valley + cleft; *Legolas* = green + foliage
- *Rivendell* is an English translation (a calque) of *Imladris*
- *Lothlórien* has more than one proposed meaning; *Galadriel*: check a dictionary
- Treat unsourced fan glosses with caution

COMING NEXT

Tolkien's Languages, Chapter 8 covers the languages that are not Elvish: Khuzdul, the Black Speech, Adûnaic and Westron, and what survives of each.

Tolkien's Languages

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Dwarves, Orcs and Men

Quenya and Sindarin get most of the attention, but Middle-earth has other peoples with other tongues. This chapter looks at Khuzdul, the Black Speech, Adûnaic and the Common Speech: what each is meant to be like, what survives, and how Tolkien used the sound of each to say something about the people who speak it.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> Tolkien gave each people a language that *sounds like their character*. Elves get flowing, Finnish-and-Welsh-style speech. Dwarves get a hard Semitic-style one. Orcs get a deliberately ugly one. Little of any of these exists, but what does is enough to see the design.

Khuzdul: The Secret Tongue of the Dwarves

In the story, the Dwarves guarded Khuzdul as a secret and shared only place names and a few phrases with outsiders. The Elvish chronicles make it a language with no known relatives, said to have been devised by the Vala Aulë, who made the Dwarves. Tolkien began developing it around 1935, before *The Hobbit* was published.

- **Design:** built mainly on Hebrew and other Semitic languages. Tolkien said the Dwarves' words were "constructed to be Semitic".
- **Roots:** words are made from three-consonant roots, as in Hebrew and Arabic, with vowel patterns changing the meaning.
- **Grammar known:** singular and plural nouns, a construct state and some case endings. Only four verbs are known.

```
# the battle-cry of the Dwarves
Baruk Khazâd! Khazâd ai-mênu!
  Axes of the Dwarves! The Dwarves are upon you!

# Balin's tomb
Balin Fundinul uzbad Khazad-dûmu
  Balin son of Fundin, lord of Moria
```

```
# words
baruk    axes           khazâd     Dwarves
aglâb    spoken language    mazarbul    records
```

That the Dwarves hide Khuzdul is more than a story point: it explains why Tolkien needed to publish so little of it.

The Black Speech

The Black Speech was made by Sauron as the one language of his servants. It never fully took: it influenced the Orcs' vocabulary but split into Orkish dialects that the Orcs could not always understand, and by the end of the Third Age they spoke mostly a debased form of the Common Speech.

- **Design:** intended to be consistent and agglutinative, with harsh sounds such as *sh*, *gh* and *zg*.
- **Attitude:** Tolkien disliked it. It exists mainly as the Ring inscription, which Chapter 4 read.
- **Words known:** *ash* "one", *nazg* "ring", *burzum* "darkness", *-ishi* "in"; verb stems *durb-* "constrain, dominate", *gimb-* "seek out", *thrak-* "bring by force", *krimp-* "bind"; also *uruk* "orc", *snaga* "slave", *ghâsh* "fire", *Lugbúrz* "Dark Tower".

The name *Nazgûl* combines *nazg* "ring" and *gûl* "wraith": "ring-wraith". One scholar has suggested that Tolkien drew on Hurrian, a real ancient language that was also agglutinative; the article presents this only as a proposal.

Adûnaic: The Language of Númenor

Adûnaic was devised shortly after the Second World War, and appears in *The Notion Club Papers*, a story Tolkien wrote around 1945. It was meant to have a "faintly Semitic flavour" and to be the source of Westron. The most developed piece is a report on its sounds and word forms, which breaks off before saying much about verbs.

```
# what exists
adûn          west
```

```
an-adûn       of the West
Zigûr         Sauron  (in the sample text)
```

Most nouns are built on three-consonant roots, as in Khuzdul, which is why the two languages feel related in design even though they belong to different peoples.

Westron: The Language You Read

The Common Speech, called Westron, is the everyday language of nearly all the peoples of the west outside the Elves. Because the books present themselves as translated from an old record, the reader meets Westron as ordinary English, and the Rohirric speech of Rohan as Old English (Chapter 2). The reader meets the "other" languages by contrast.

LANGUAGE	MODEL	WHAT SURVIVES
Khuzdul	Hebrew and other Semitic languages	A few words and phrases; four known verbs
Black Speech	Harsh sounds; possibly Hurrian-style agglutination	The Ring verse and a handful of words
Adûnaic	Semitic flavour	Names, a sample text and an unfinished report
Westron	None given: shown as English	Shown in English translation

WATCH OUT: "DWARVISH" IS NOT ELVISH IN ANOTHER COSTUME

The Dwarves' language has a different design (roots and vowel patterns, not endings). Words from Khuzdul do not follow the rules of Quenya or Sindarin, and the reverse.

WATCH OUT: DO NOT TRUST LONG "KHUZDUL" OR "BLACK SPEECH" TRANSLATIONS

Only a few words of each are known. A website that offers whole sentences in either has filled the gaps with guesses, and those are not Tolkien's.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Gimli speaks a full language."** The Khuzdul he uses is a handful of words.

- **"The Black Speech is the language of all Orcs."** Orcs mostly spoke a debased Common Speech by the end of the Third Age.
- **"Adûnaic is Elvish."** It is the language of Men and has a different design.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Give the meaning of *Baruk Khazâd! Khazâd ai-mênu!* and of *Balin Fundinul uzbad Khazad-dûmu*, and name three known Khuzdul words. Say what the language was built on.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Using the glosses in this chapter, translate *nazg*, *burzum*, *gimb-* and the name *Nazgûl*. Explain why Tolkien's dislike of the language is part of why so little exists.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain how Tolkien shows the character of a people through the sound of its language, with an example for Elves, Dwarves and Orcs. Say what the reader of the English book meets instead of Westron.

View solution

CHAPTER 8 QUICK REFERENCE

- **Khuzdul:** Semitic design; roots of three consonants; *Baruk Khazâd!*; four known verbs
- **Black Speech:** made by Sauron; harsh and agglutinative; *ash nazg*; *burzum* darkness
- **Adûnaic:** Semitic flavour; source of Westron; mostly names and an unfinished report
- **Westron:** the Common Speech, shown to the reader as English

- Sound is character: each people's language is designed to fit it

COMING NEXT

Tolkien's Languages, Chapter 9 goes back through time: how the languages changed over Tolkien's life, from the first Qenya to the late Quenya and Sindarin, and why the forms in different books disagree.

Tolkien's Languages

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · A History Behind the Words

The Elvish of *The Lord of the Rings* is not the Elvish Tolkien began with. He started in his schooldays and kept changing his languages for more than fifty years. This chapter follows that history, so you can tell why one source gives a different word or ending from another, and why the careful approach in earlier chapters (checking where a form comes from) matters.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> There is not one "Tolkien's Elvish". There are stages, and the forms of an early stage may be abandoned or reused for something else in a later one. Good learners ask which stage a form belongs to.

A Timeline

PERIOD	WHAT HAPPENS
c. 1910–1911	Tolkien, a schoolboy in Birmingham, begins his first Elvish language. He later calls it *Qenya*.
1910s	A second, Welsh-like language takes shape, called *Gnomish* or *Goldogrin*. Its Lexicon, compiled in 1917, has about 3,000 entries.
1920s–1930s	The Gnomish line becomes *Noldorin*. In the early 1930s Tolkien rewrites Noldorin's grammar (called "late conceptual Noldorin").
1937	He writes the *Lhammas* ("Account of Tongues"), the family history of the languages, in the same period as the *Etymologies*.
Late 1930s–1940s	The Noldorin of the *Etymologies* and *Lhammas* is the working Elvish of the story as it is first drafted.
c. 1951 onward	Tolkien adopts the name *Sindarin*: the old Noldorin becomes Sindarin, and a new "Noldorin" becomes a dialect of Quenya.

The Name Swap

The most confusing change is a swap of names. In the earlier documents, *Noldorin* means the grey-elven language. Later, Tolkien decided that this language would be called *Sindarin*, and that

"Noldorin" would mean the Quenya spoken by the Noldor in exile. A reader of an early document who meets "Noldorin" is reading about what the later books call Sindarin.

```
# the swap
earlier writing                  later writing
  Gnomish / Goldogrin   →         the early form of Sindarin
  Noldorin              →         Sindarin
  (new) Noldorin        =         the Quenya spoken by the exiled Noldor
```

The Key Documents

- **The Gnomish Lexicon and the Qenya Lexicon:** the early word-lists, published long after Tolkien's death in the journal *Parma Eldalamberon*.
- **The Etymologies:** a large word-list of Elvish roots, written in the 1930s. It reflects an earlier stage than *The Lord of the Rings*, so its words are not always valid for the later Sindarin.
- **The Lhammas:** an account of the language family. It appears in *The Lost Road and Other Writings*.
- **The Lord of the Rings and its appendices:** the texts published in Tolkien's lifetime, and so the safest base.

Why It Matters

Three practical consequences follow for anyone who writes or reads Elvish:

1. **A word may be valid for one stage only.** An entry in the *Etymologies* can describe a Noldorin word that never became Sindarin.
2. **Grammar changed too.** A paradigm from the early 1930s may not fit the late Quenya of Chapter 5.
3. **Editors matter.** Scholars have edited Tolkien's papers for the journals, and their notes tell you which stage and date a form belongs to.

> **WATCH OUT: AN OLD SOURCE IS NOT A WRONG SOURCE, BUT IT IS A DIFFERENT STAGE**
>
> Treat a word from the Gnomish Lexicon like a word from an earlier language, not like a mistake. Nothing in this course depends on the earliest stages, but fan dictionaries often mix stages without

saying.

WATCH OUT: DATES DIFFER BETWEEN SOURCES

Sources disagree on the exact dating of some stages. Where this chapter gives a year it follows the most commonly cited one, but treat dates as approximate.

COMMON MYTHS

- **"Tolkien finished his languages."** He kept revising them for most of his life.
- **"Noldorin and Sindarin are two different languages."** In the old writings, Noldorin is the earlier name of what became Sindarin.
- **"The Etymologies is the dictionary of Sindarin."** It reflects an earlier stage, so it must be used with care.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Draw a timeline from memory with at least four stages of Tolkien's Elvish languages, and mark the name swap between Noldorin and Sindarin.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

A fan website lists a word from the *Etymologies* as "Sindarin". Explain what could be wrong with that label and what you would check.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain in your own words how Tolkien's constant revising is both a strength and a difficulty for a learner. Give one example of each from this chapter.

View solution

CHAPTER 9 QUICK REFERENCE

- c. 1910: Qenya; 1910s: Gnomish; 1920s–30s: Noldorin; c. 1951: Sindarin; Quenya refined throughout
- Name swap: the old Noldorin becomes Sindarin; the new Noldorin is a dialect of Quenya
- Key documents: Gnomish and Qenya Lexicons, *Etymologies*, *Lhammas*, *The Lord of the Rings*
- The safest base is what Tolkien published in his lifetime
- Always ask: which stage does this form belong to?

COMING NEXT

Tolkien's Languages, Chapter 10 is the last: what has happened to Elvish since Tolkien, the scholars and fans who work on it, where to keep learning, and a recap of the course.

Tolkien's Languages

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · After Tolkien

Tolkien died in 1973, leaving most of his language work unpublished. The story of Elvish did not end there. This last chapter looks at the scholars who edit his papers, the fans who use and extend the languages, the films, and where you can keep learning. It ends with a recap of the whole course.

> **THE IDEA IN A BOX**
>
> After Tolkien, two groups carry Elvish forward: scholars, who publish what he actually wrote, and fans, who add what he did not. A good learner knows which is which.

The Scholars

Most of what is known about the languages beyond the published books comes from Tolkien's papers, edited and printed after his death. The main publisher is the **Elvish Linguistic Fellowship**, founded in 1988 and a special interest group of the Mythopoeic Society. It publishes two journals you have already met:

JOURNAL	WHAT IT PUBLISHES
Parma Eldalamberon	Complete texts of Tolkien's linguistic manuscripts, such as the early lexicons
Vinyar Tengwar	Shorter pieces, notes and discussion

The editors named in the sources include Christopher Gilson, Carl Hostetter, Arden Smith, Bill Welden and Patrick Wynne. Much of the material came from photocopies supplied by Christopher Tolkien, Tolkien's son and literary executor, and from notes taken in the Bodleian Library.

The Fans

Tolkien left a vocabulary of about 25,000 published Elvish words (as of 2008, counting all stages), but no modern concepts: there is no Elvish word for "telephone". Fans have written in Sindarin

since the 1970s and have added words and phrases to make the languages usable. These additions are not Tolkien's, and good fan work labels them as such (Chapter 1).

Elvish has also spread to other fiction. Later authors created their own elf-languages, some borrowing sounds and forms from Tolkien: the Ancient Language of *The Inheritance Cycle*, Eltharin in Warhammer, and Darnassian in Warcraft are among them.

The Films

For the film adaptations, David Salo wrote the sung and spoken Elvish dialogue for Peter Jackson. Salo also proposed a more detailed system of Sindarin mutation than the one in the older sources (Chapter 6). Film Elvish is therefore a performance built on a scholar's interpretation, not a direct quotation of Tolkien.

Where to Keep Learning

RESOURCE	WHAT IT OFFERS
Eldamo	A dictionary and word database that cites the source of every form; also an introductory Quenya course
Parf Edhellen	An online Elvish dictionary
Elvish Linguistic Fellowship	The journals and the scholarly community
The Lord of the Rings and its appendices	The texts published in Tolkien's lifetime

The forms in this course were taken from introductory sources and flagged where they were built by rule. Before using any in real writing, check them in one of these.

Course Recap

WHAT TOLKIEN'S LANGUAGES COVERED

- **Chapter 1:** Tolkien the philologist; why he invented languages; Quenya and Sindarin; *Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo* and *Mae govannen*
- **Chapter 2:** the Elvish family tree and the other languages of Middle-earth
- **Chapter 3:** sounds: Finnish and Welsh models, vowels, spellings, the stress rule
- **Chapter 4:** Tengwar, Cirth and the Ring verse
- **Chapter 5:** Quenya: plurals, the article, cases, verbs and suffixes
- **Chapter 6:** Sindarin: mutation, plurals by vowel change, verbs
- **Chapter 7:** reading names: *Mithrandir*, *Imladris*, *Legolas*, calques
- **Chapter 8:** Khuzdul, the Black Speech, Adûnaic and Westron
- **Chapter 9:** the history of the languages: Qenya, Gnomish, Noldorin, Sindarin
- **Chapter 10:** scholars, fans, the films and where to learn more

WATCH OUT: THIS COURSE IS A BEGINNER'S MAP

Several forms in this course were built by rule from introductory sources and flagged as such. Before using a form in real writing or speech, check it in Eldamo or Parf Edhellen. The planned Quenya Grammar 1 and Sindarin Grammar 1 courses will go much deeper.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Name the two journals of the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship and say what each publishes. Explain why a learner should prefer a form that comes from them over one from a fan site.

View solution

EXERCISE 2

Write a short passage using only forms from this course: greet someone in Quenya, say a Sindarin greeting, and name two places or people with a meaning from Chapter 7. Mark which forms came from Tolkien and which were built by rule.

View solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain in your own words three things you learnt about Tolkien's languages that surprised you, and say how you would check an Elvish phrase before using it.

View solution

COURSE COMPLETE

You have finished *Tolkien's Languages*. For the wider picture of invented languages, see *Constructed Languages*; for another language with a community behind it, see *Na'vi 1* or *Klingon Grammar 1*.