Elvish Linguistics:
The Science of Sindarin

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Introduction

In one of his many letters, Tolkien noted that Elvish was intended to be European in structure, and "specially pleasant". Whilst the former can be achieved through the study of suitable languages, the likes of which would have been familiar to Tolkien, the latter is not predicated on a similar logic. Tolkien himself acknowledged the inherent ambiguity of his intentions having also stated that "individuals' personal predilections, especially in the phonetic structure of languages, varies widely" (letters: 175-76). So in the same way that Marc Okrand intended for *Klingon* to sound intrinsically extraterrestrial, it was Tolkien's fundamental interest to make Elvish a beautiful language to speak and to hear. Therefore, despite the intent for creating Elvish being incorrectly attributed to stories such as *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, it would appear that Tolkien's ambition was one rooted purely for his own pleasure.

At the point at which Tolkien had published his first book, he had been working on his languages for over forty years (Okrent, 2010:283). So whilst Marc Okrand was employed to create the aforementioned Klingon for the writers of *Star Trek*, and James Cameron requested *Na'vi* to benefit the plotlines of *Avatar*, Tolkien succumbed to what he referred to as his "secret vice" (Secret Vice, Tolkien 1931). So it would appear that whilst the majority of artistic languages, or *artlangs*, are created to satisfy the requirement of a story, Tolkien's circumstances appeared the reverse having utilised his stories as a catalyst for publicly acknowledging his passion for linguistics. However, an inappreciable amount of his linguistic efforts were considered to be appropriate to include in his works by Collins, based on the premise that readers would find a greater concentration of fictional language to be a distraction from the narrative (Carpenter, 1977:211). However, following Tolkien's insistence for his Elvish to remain, along with a set of appendices that explained the fictional lands of Middle-earth, his efforts proved successful when the book was later published by Allen and Unwin. Of these six appendices, two were written to further elaborate the spoken and written languages of Middle-earth, and suffice to say that questions would have arisen

as to why Tolkien went to such an extent to not only *write* the languages, but to provide a guide covering some twenty-five pages with instruction to the pronunciation of those languages.

Towards the end of his career, groups began to form with a shared interest in analysing Tolkien's linguistic work. For those who simply wanted to show appreciation for the stories, the *Tolkien Society* was formed 1969, but those who took more of an interest in the academic aspects of his work, *Parma Eldalamberon* was formed in 1971, and is still active today with the support of Tolkien's youngest son, Christopher Tolkien.

But what motivated Tolkien to continue developing Elvish languages over the entirety of his career? How close do they resemble the languages he chose to study? Did he give the same importance to an Elvish orthography as he did the spoken word? These are questions that have intrigued the minds of linguists, fans and academics alike for over fifty years. It is the intention of this paper to address such questions, with reference to the influences of the Elvish language, evidenced by appropriate phonemic theory.

The Earliest Elvish

Whilst Tolkien's dedication to academia would have undoubtedly impacted on his career, his Latin tuition during early childhood arguably shaped his subsequent linguistic trajectory, as did his attendance at King Edward's School in Birmingham, given that classical languages formed the backbone of their curriculum. It was here that he furthered his command of Latin, as well as Ancient Greek; the languages that are said to have awakened his appetite for invented languages (Carpenter, 1977:36). Collectively they inspired him to write Primitive Quendian, the root of the Elvish languages that later evolved to the renowned Quenya. Described as being an Elven-Latin, Quenya closely resembled Latin in its early stages (Tolkien, 1981:144), and although the grammar remained largely consistent, despite an ongoing restructuring, the

phonemic aspects altered frequently, and consistent with subsequent linguistic influence, or what Tolkien deemed to be more phonetically "fit".

At the same time that Quenya was in its infancy, Tolkien was writing a second language known as Gnomish, which like Quenya, was on a trajectory for consistent evolution. Initially renamed to Telerin, Gnomish eventually became Sindarin, which along with the aforementioned Quenya were Tolkien's most developed languages. The first word list was completed in 1917 during Tolkien's study of Welsh, which was unsurprisingly a key influence of the language. Again, he spoke freely of his passion for linguistic aesthetics having stated that an early sighting of engraved Welsh pierced his "linguistic heart" (Tolkien, 1997:189).

In addition to Latin and Welsh texts, Tolkien also found pleasure in the phonemic aspects of Finnish folk writing. In 1849 Elias Lönnrot published a collection of texts known as the Kalevala, consisting of poetry and ancient tales from the lowlands of Finland. Given that Tolkien frequently saw loss of meaning through translation, he taught himself Finnish with the interest of reading the Kalevala in its original language; consequently, Finnish became another linguistic influence for both Quenya and Sindarin.

The languages that influenced Elvish were, for the most part, those which attracted his attention whilst in ignorance of their respective semantic definitions. Tolkien's interest was one more of phonetics rather than grammar or syntax, despite dedicating his life to the study of languages. He was not striving for Elvish to become the next Esperanto, nor was it ever his intention to complete any language. The way in which Elvish sounded when spoken, and how the language appeared when written were Tolkien's priorities moreover than any other measurable linguistic quality. This is evidenced clearly in his published letters where he writes of his invention of languages being a "private enterprise undertaken to give pleasure to myself, by giving expression to my personal linguistic 'aesthetic'" (Tolkien, 1981:380).

Establishing Elvish

Following the nexus of languages he created in the early part of his career, Tolkien continued the development of Elvish to append a sense of cohesion between his studies and the linguistic history and nomenclature of Middle-earth. As *The Lord of the Rings* was set in the third millennia of Middle-earth's Third Age, a sense of archaism would dictate significant lexical and phonemic alterations, given that languages had been in use since the First Age[†]. The resulting Sindarin and Quenya, today given a "Classical" prefix to distinguish them from previous instances, were further developed by Tolkien throughout his lifetime, again making changes in keeping with his ever-changing personal aesthetic.
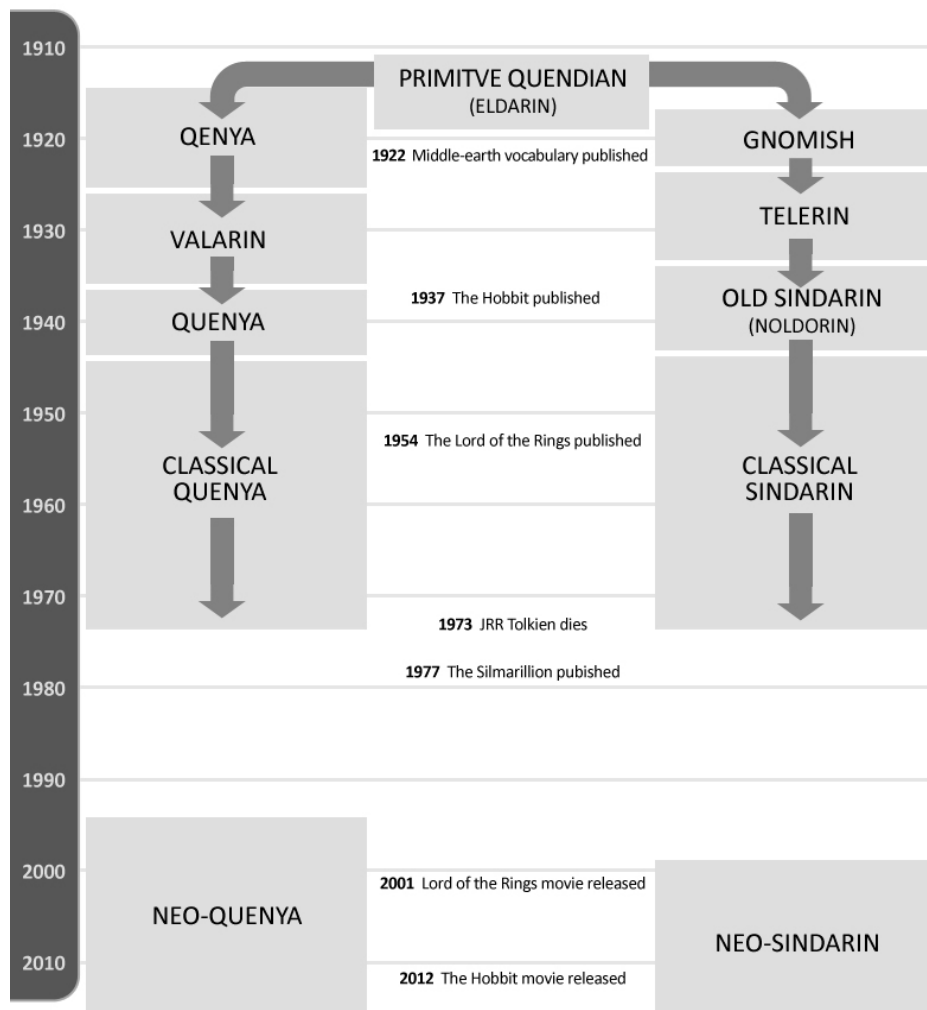
[†] Whilst we are unsure of just how long the Ages were, being measured in the undefined Valian years, we *are* aware that they are respectively longer than our own solar years.

His languages soon became the interest of fellow linguists and scholars, whilst fans became increasingly interested in a potential sequel to the trilogy. He then retired from his academic post at Oxford University and relocated to the south coast, but continued writing until his passing in 1973. Christopher Tolkien then became the sole literary executor of the Tolkien Estate, and consequently inherited a substantial amount of his father's material; some then edited and subsequently published, such as *The Silmarillion*, whilst other documents were donated to the Bodleian Library. Other fragments of text and smaller documents currently in the possession of the Tolkien Estate have also been copied to chosen literary groups at the discretion of Christopher Tolkien for academic employment.

The generosity of the Tolkien Estate has enabled a number of projects of varying magnitude to be undertaken, from the analysis of markings in Tolkien's diary, to the translation of the Bible into Quenya. Helge Fauskanger, a Norwegian linguist and contributor to the aforementioned biblical translation used this material made available by the Estate to author what is today known as Neo-Quenya (see above diagram). He extended the Quenya vocabulary and wordlist by reference to the existing corpus, the resultant work of which would have otherwise been far more fragmented without this material.

The turn of the century then saw Tolkien's literature and language revisited with the release of Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings film trilogy. It was Jackson's decision to add further Elvish dialogue to his films, some of which could not be translated by reference to Tolkien's existing Sindarin lexicon. Consequently, a doctoral graduate of Wisconsin University, David Salo, was employed for the purpose of creating the required vocabulary, having previously begun significant work based on Tolkien's linguistic works. This post gave Salo the opportunity to solidify this work in his publication *A Gateway to Sindarin*, published shortly after the conclusion of Jackson's work in 2004. This extension of Tolkien's work received mixed opinions by existing academics in the field as it adopted the name of Neo-Sindarin (see above diagram). Although Fauskanger had already begun his aforementioned

Quenya project at this time, it was already established as having no such commercial connotations, as were acknowledgements of his translations being his own interpretation of Tolkien's work.

Elvish: The spoken word

Given that it is the most established of Tolkien's languages and a frequent reference for Elvish following Jackson's films, my focus will be primarily on Sindarin. During its evolution from its Gnomish predecessor, Tolkien created a number of additional languages through his continued search for his personal linguistic aesthetic. What Tolkien referred to as Telerin became the original language of the first line of the Elves, and those who later settled in the lands of Beleriand (West of Middle-earth), established Old Sindarin. It would therefore appear that Tolkien used the development of his languages to establish linguistic consistency in his stories. However, Old Sindarin was only the beginning of what would later emerge as a network of subsequent dialects (below); some more complete than others, although none of which being as exhaustive as the aforementioned Classical Sindarin.
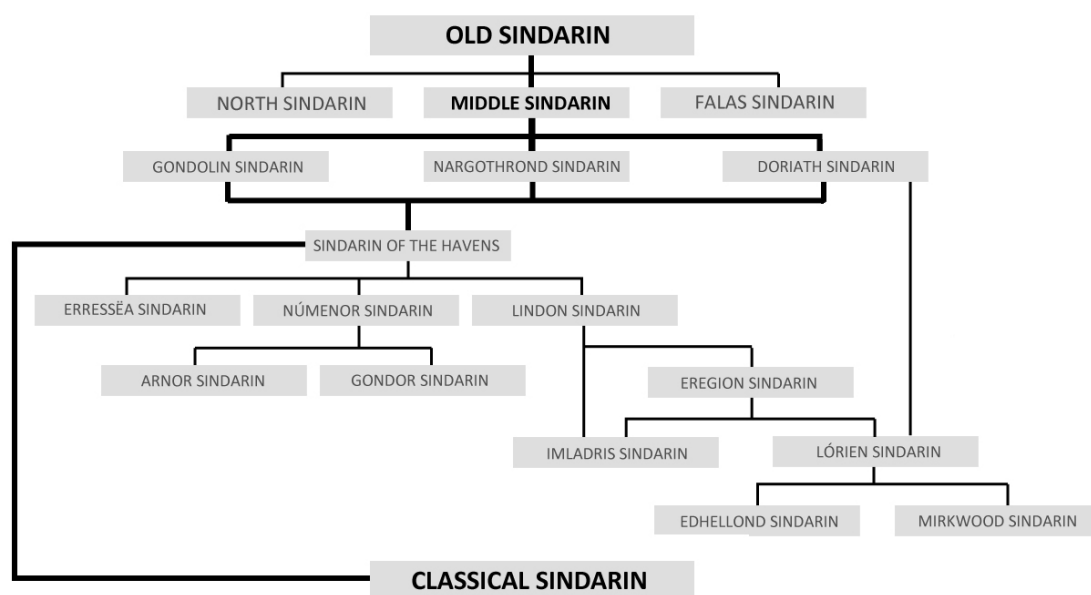
Much like the majority of Tolkien's languages, Sindarin is largely phonetic, and therefore dispenses with the ambiguity associated with the English phonology. For example, the letter /c/ in most cases represents the /k/ phoneme (*c*limb, *c*arrot, *c*omfort), but also symbolises the /s/ phoneme (*c*ircle, *c*ellar, *c*edar). In the same way, the letter /y/ can represent either a consonant (*y*es), a vowel (m*y*th) or a diphthong (pla*y*). In recognising the phonetic duplication between the /c/ and /k/, Tolkien used only the former for Sindarin, thus removing the latter from the orthography altogether. The /y/ also maintains the same phonetic integrity, but represents the phoneme of the same letter from the Finnish alphabet, which in English phonology sounds like a doubled /o/ (f*oo*d, b*oo*t). So whilst Tolkien conformed to a discipline of using one sound for each letter, he did not follow the orthographic values of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), but instead made associations of his own choosing.

The remaining consonants resemble English phonetic associations, but by comparison are constrained by their manner of pronunciation; the plosive series providing a good example. Plosive consonants (b, d, g, t, p, and k) are produced by stopping the flow from the lungs with the lips or teeth, and then suddenly releasing the air. Depending on whether the vocal chords vibrate during articulation, they can be either voiced (*d*og) or unvoiced (*t*ime). The English language, as with a number of other languages (traditional Welsh and Finnish in particular), categorise the plosives into their respective groups of voiced (b, d, g) and voiceless (t, p, k). Tolkien adopted the same use of voicing for the Elvish plosives, along with the associated lenition (or softening) frequently use in Welsh. In specific syntactical scenarios such as compounded words (shown below), voiceless plosives become lenited and thus take the phonetic value of the voiced counterpart. In so doing syllabic stress is alleviated resulting in a more vocalic articulation. When comparing Tolkien's use of Welsh lenition in Sindarin, Latin words adapted for the Welsh language best illustrate the comparative similarities (Allan, 2002:57).

	Sindarin		Latin > Welsh	
P>B	**P**eleth	Nar**b**eleth	**P**o**p**ulus	**P**o**b**l
	(waning)	(sun-waning)	(people)	
T>D	**T**alf	Nin**d**alf	**L**a**t**ro	**L**lei**d**r
	(field)	(wet field)	(thief)	
C>G	**C**alad	Gil**g**alad	Pla**c**itum	Ple**g**yd
	(bright)	(starlight)	(principle)	

Plosive consonants are also measured by levels of aspiration, or the amount of air used when articulated. Aspirated plosives are often found at the start of a stressed syllable (six***t***een, ***p***ie), and use more air compared to unaspirated plosives found at mid-syllabic points (a***p***t), or at the start of an unstressed syllable (***t***oday), in which the release of air is interrupted by the voicing of the following vowel or consonant. Aspiration in the English language is often thought of as non-distinctive, or unpredictable on the grounds that its occurrence adheres to context-sensitive rules. For example, the /t/ phoneme can be articulated either with (***t***op), or without aspiration (s***t***op), whereas other European languages such as French, Russian and Finnish, are not associated with such ambiguity. Finnish is of further importance in this context as again, unlike English, it does not use aspiration for stressed phonemes; something of which Tolkien found to be of significant aesthetic value having adopted the same for Sindarin. Although remaining unstated in his notes, the same can also be assumed of Quenya using recordings of Tolkien[†] as a basis.

[†] An audio recording of Tolkien made in 1952 reciting *Namárië* (a poem from The Lord of the Rings)

An analysis of the vowels will further illustrate the influence of Finnish in the Sindarin phonology; specifically the assimilation process known as *vowel harmony*. In practise, this becomes a phonotactic restriction that indicates which of the available vowels can co-occur within a word. To demonstrate how vowel harmony is used in Elvish, the process of pronunciation must first be elaborated to incorporate the relevant articulation methods.

When pronouncing a vowel, the tongue can be localised to the front, centre, or back of the mouth, and is referred to as *vowel backness*. This position of the tongue relative to the roof of the mouth is also an articulation property measured as open, mid or close, and referred to as *vowel height*. Both the vowel backness and height combine to give each vowel different phonemic characteristics. As the potential combinations of both properties exceed the amount of available vowels, some dialects will associate each vowel letter to more than one phoneme. For example, the words "h**a**t" (hæt) and "b**a**th" (bɑθ) indicate the difference between an *open front* and *open back* /a/ vowel resepctively[†]. Such phonemes collectively form part of what is known as the cardinal vowel system[‡], and using the associated two-dimensional vowel space, we can isolate the phonemes used in Sindarin by combining the relevant vowel backness with the respective vowel height (see below – note that Sindarin phonemes are shown in red).

As shown below, Sindarin uses a single phoneme for each letter, collectively forming a six cardinal vowel system, which again, by comparison to the English vowel phonology, minimises potential ambiguity. Tolkien also included five additional *long* vowels (á, é, í, ó and ú), in place of vowel doubling (b**ee**n, m**oo**n), but rather than changing the phonemic characteristics, they are articulated in the same manner as the respective short vowels, but held for twice as long. Collectively, this vowel system illustrates another influence of the Finnish language that Tolkien found suitably aesthetic for his own use.

[†] assuming a Southern-English dialect

[‡] the cardinal vowels form a phonetic reference system consisting of all possible phonemic combinations of vowel height and vowel backness

VOWEL BACKNESS — front / centre / back; VOWEL HEIGHT — close, mid, open. Vowels: i, ɨ (Sindarin /y/), u; e, ə, o; a, ä, ɑ
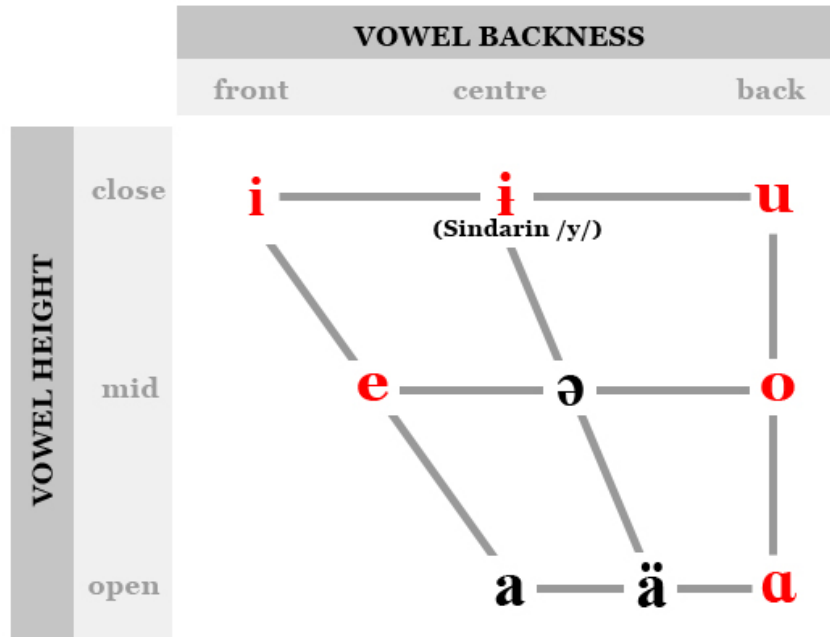
Looking further into the phonemic consistencies of Sindarin, it is noticed that the /y/ vowel appears only in words containing /e/ or /i/ vowels. Whilst this may seem arbitrary in the ignorance of the aforementioned influences, this remains consistent with Finnish vowel harmony. Based on three vowel groups of front, neutral and rear, conforming words and phrases sound more rounded, or *harmonic*. The associated harmony is achieved by restricting the co-occurrence of vowels from the front and rear (harmonic) vowel groups in uncompounded words, whilst the harmonically neutral vowels can be paired with either of the harmonic groups.

FRONT: y (soon). NEUTRAL: e (bed), i (marine). BACK: a (father), o (hot), u (brute)
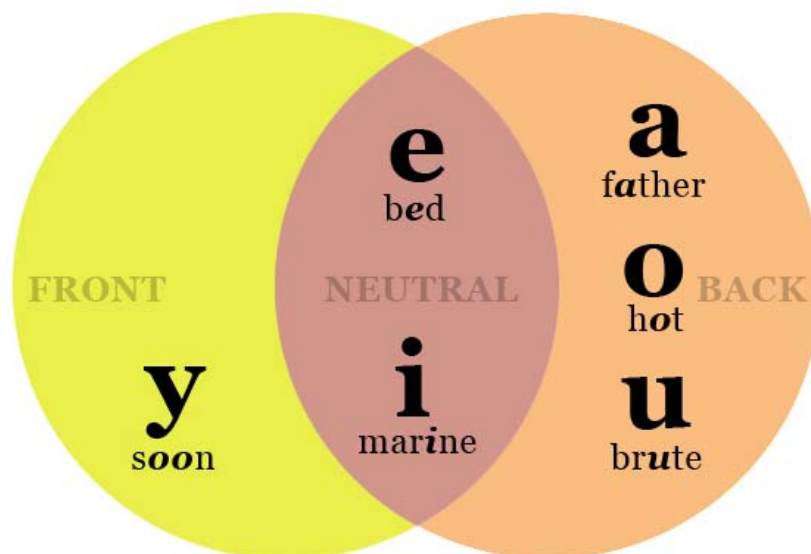
The front and rear harmonic vowels demonstrate the extremes of vowel backness, and in the case of English phonology, the same of vowel height. To illustrate how the absence of vowel harmony changes the sound of a language, we can compare suitable English words, noting the shift from front to rear harmonic vowels.

HARMONIC		NON-HARMONIC
FRONT + NEUTRAL	NEUTRAL + BACK	FRONT + BACK
Bedr**oo**m	St**e**pf**a**ther	**Ca**rt**oo**n

In order to maintain the desired methods of articulation outlined above, it is also necessary for the words of Sindarin to mutate under specific circumstances. Overlooking the grammatical aspects of these mutations, most serve to soften the consonant voicing and aspiration that Tolkien found to be undesirable. In the same way as the previous lenition example, consonants are again lenited, either in initial or final word positions when neighboured by a vowel (Salo, 2004:88).

pân (plank) > i **b**ân (the plank)

tawar (forest) > i **d**awar (the forest)

calad (light) > i **g**alad (the light)

However, despite the aesthetic qualities that were strived for, and the dedication shown to providing a vocalic delivery, Tolkien never intended for this amalgam of his favoured languages to be considered outside the context of its fictional purpose. From the outset of their involvement in his stories, Tolkien's ambitions for his Elvish languages remained the same, which along

with pleasing phonoaesthetic qualities, were centred on maintaining a balance of antiquity and historicity, (Tolkien, 1981:380).

> " *[The] process of invention [of Elvish languages]... was largely antecedent to the composing of legends and 'histories' in which these languages could be 'realized'.* "

Black Speech: the anti-language

Given that Elvish was, as the name suggests, used primarily by Elves, additional languages were required for the other races of Tolkien's Middle-earth to uphold the aforementioned historicity. Most of the languages used in his stories were predecessors to either Sindarin or Quenya, each reflecting Tolkien's preferential influences of Finnish, Welsh and Latin; however there is one language which contradicts his "personal aesthetic". *Black Speech*, we are told by Tolkien, was devised by Sauron who sought to gain control over all powers of Middle-earth (Tolkien, 1991:1105). It was Sauron's intention to make his Black Speech the language of all who served him, but despite his failure to do so, many of the words survived the Third Age merging with the dialects of the Orcs, then known as *Orkish*. It was later revived at the end of the Third Age when Sauron again rose to power, and Black Speech became the common tongue for the lands of Mordor.

Those that used the Black Speech were also made responsible in Tolkien's writing for reflecting the experiences of his lifetime that he subsequently despised. He would continually oppose negative environmental factors having been subject to the lasting effects of industry in his suburban Birmingham home. The same actions were played out by the inhabitants of Mordor in the felling and burning of trees, thus in the same way, exerting their dominance over nature. The Dead Marshes at the entrance to Mordor that were littered with the fatalities of war is also reminiscent of Tolkien's experience of the trenches of World War I. These metaphors would therefore suggest that the phonemics of the language associated with such an environment would be a

means by which Tolkien could illustrate the areas of phonetics that he disliked (Tolkien, 1996:21);

> " *The orcs... had languages of their own, as hideous as all things that they made or used... their tongues were endlessly diversified in form, as they were deadly monotonous in purport, fluent only in the expression of abuse, of hatred and fear.* "

Unlike Quenya and Sindarin, the Black Speech is very fragmented both grammatically and phonetically, and as such difficult to analyse in terms of its influences. Whilst grammatical parallels of Hurrian (the language spoken by the people of Mesopotamia in 2000BC) have been noted by historians sharing an interest in the field (Fauskanger, 2013), this conjectured analysis is based on a limited corpus of two phrases; the most memorable of all being the inscription of the renowned One Ring created by Sauron;

> "*Uglúk u bagronk sha pushdug Saruman-glob búbhosh skai!*"
> (Uglúk to the dung-pit with stinking Saruman-filth, pig-guts, gah!)

> "*Ash nazg durbatulûk, ash nazg gimbatul,*
> *ash nazg thrakatulûk, agh burzum ishi krimpatul.*"
> (One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
> One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them)

Whilst we are aware that Tolkien found the Black Speech to be 'hideous', nowhere does he elaborate on what he considers to be the negative aspects of phonemics. However, potential areas can be established by reference to the aforementioned positive aspects of Sindarin. For example, as we know the /û/ to be pronounced in the same way as the front /y/ vowel found in Sindarin (Daniel, 2013), the co-occuring back /u/ vowel found in both "Uglúk" and "durbatulûk" serves to contradict the aforementioned vowel harmony. Furthermore, the five neutral vowels instances[†] compared to thirty-six

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[†] Note that no /e/ vowels are used whatsoever in the Black Speech

remaining vowels which appear in the samples show a clear donimance of back vowels, that when compared to a Sindarin text of comparable length[‡] show this use of phonology to again, contradict Tolkien's preferred aesthetic.

An analysis of the consonants used in the Black Speech also show a frequent use of /z/, or the voiced sibilant which, omitting two attested instances, is avoided in Sindarin, thus suggesting a preference for voiceless counterpart (/s/) which is used far more frequently. Furthermore, a consonant to vowel ratio of 3:1, in the absence of a comparative language may seem irrelevant, but in contrast to the 2:1 ratio found in Sindarin[±] could easily suggest a balance of vowels and consonants to again be another of Tolkien's favourable phonemic characteristics.

Finally, it is noticed that almost half of the words in the attested scripts end with a plosive, and having no following voiced phoneme it is assumed that the /k/ becomes aspirated, again unlike the Sindarin equivalent. It is also possible that Tolkien used the 'k' character for this phoneme to differentiate it from the unaspirated 'c' used in Sindarin when using the Latin alphabet[†]. By contrast, a majority of Sindarin words end with a vowel, thus using an open vocal tract that in turn promotes a continual air flow from any given consonant. Therefore, by introducing the stop of air associated with the plosive, it would appear that Tolkien does this intentionally, and to emphasise his dislike of broken articulated flow.

Even from this brief analysis it is clear that Tolkien uses the aforementioned phonemics as a catalyst to portray the persona of evil in his fiction; the characters themselves not being suitably educated, or having little interest for language (Allen, 2002:166). It is therefore of no ironic sense that Jackson had the same characters speak with an east-London accent, almost cockney, where

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[‡] Tolkien's part-translation of the Lord's Prayer (Hostetter, 2002:21-22) shows forty-five instances of neutral vowels compared to thirty-one back vowels

[±] *A Elbereth Gilthoniel* used as Sindarin sample (Tolkien, 1991:184)

[†] Sindarin and the Black Speech were written using the Tengwar alphabet from within the context of his stories, but also written more frequently in his own notes using the Latin alphabet.

words frequently become unfinished or distorted. Whether this is how Tolkien would have perceived the anglicising of such languages however, is mere conjecture.

Elvish: The written word

Since the interest in Elvish languages began shortly after the publishing of The Lord of the Rings, all scripts known to be written by Tolkien have been catalogued and compartmentalised in the interest of assisting the orthographic analysis of his work. Compiled by Forodrim, a Swedish linguistic society, the Mellonath Daeron Indices of Tengwar Specimina and Cirth Specimina have become a keen focus for like-minded Tolkien enthusiasts. Founded in 1972, Forodrim are recognised as one of the oldest Tolkien fan organisations, and remain active by adding to these lists as more documents are discovered, or passed on by the Tolkien Estate.

Despite a number of documents showing Tolkien to have written scripts using alternating letters and glyphs, most are considered transitory to what is today recognised as three main orthographies; the Sarati, the Cirth and the Tengwar. First used in 1919, the Sarati is known to be the earliest of Tolkien's orthographic work, and originated as a secret code for writing English in his diaries (Stenström, 2011:20). According to Tolkien, the alphabet covered nearly every sound imaginable (Bjorkman, 2013), although the attested samples used an assumed subset. Unlike any other orthography that Tolkien created after the Sarati, the attested samples show the script to be written left-to-right, or right-to-left, as well as top-to-bottom and boustrophedon (bi-directional).

The rune system, or Cirth, then followed the Sarati and given Tolkien's passion for the writing and verse of Old English, it is not surprising that the earliest markings, despite the use of different phonetic values, were almost identical to the Anglo-Saxon runes. Much like Tolkien's other writing systems, the Cirth evolved over time, both adding and substituting values as he saw fit.

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The system was first seen published in *The Hobbit* where the Cirth is used to rewrite modern English; the later systems were then bought into his stories as a requirement for the Elves to write the Sindarin language. The Silmarillion tells of Daeron, an Elf skilled in linguistics (also referred to as a Loremaster), who created the first Cirth alphabet known as *Certhas Daeron*. The same system then evolved to include more glyphs as required for the expansion of the language, and by which time was known as *Angerthas Daeron*. The Noldor, or higher Elves, also adopted the Cirth in order that they could use the system for Quenya (known as the *Certar*), as well as the Dwarves (*Angerthas Moria*) whose materials of wood and stone favoured the straight edges of the glyphs. By the time The Lord of the Rings was published, the Cirth had become more conceptual to the extent that most of the glyphs no longer resembled the aforementioned Anglo-Saxon system.

Both the Sarati and the Cirth systems were forerunners to the Tengwar, which from a fictional perspective of the stories, took the place of the previous alphabets; although the glyphs themselves were based largely on the Sarati. Being the alphabet frequently associated with The Lord of the Rings, the Tengwar has become very popular among those wishing to learn to write

Elvish, or create a script for jewellery or tattoos[†]; the text on the One Ring arguably being a focal point for influence, despite the Tengwar in this case representing the Black Speech rather than an Elvish language. This would therefore suggest that the lettering created by Tolkien remains aesthetically pleasing, despite an ignorance for the represented content. However, regardless of whether Tolkien intended for the Tengwar to serve such a purpose, his intention for its creation was one far more systematic.

Whilst the concept of an ideal alphabet may not always be a consideration for fictional language authors, those that make it their interest to do so inevitably face the same conundrum of how best to represent the language when reducing it to a set of characters. At the extreme of this scale would be language represented in its most abstract form, in which the symbols used to represent the phonemes require a prerequisite knowledge in order to read (Allan, 2002:255). A good example of which being Okrand's Klingon. Despite being based on phonemes referenced to the IPA, the glyphs give very little indication as to the phonetic representation.

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ᴕᴙ℘ᴸᴘ⸲ᴝᴸI ᴸᴘᴫ⸸ᴦ⸲ᴸᴘ⸲▲
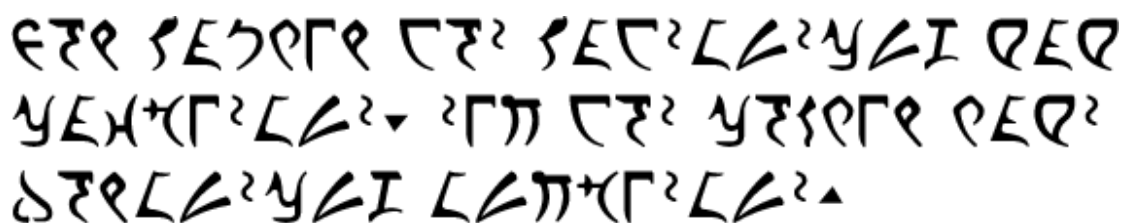
The other end of the scale would reduce this level to the mere phonemic output of the reader, representing the language using a standardised Latin orthography, in which the letters can be associated with the corresponding phonetic values found in the IPA. Kreig postulated that the ideal system would represent a mid-point between both examples; that is to say, an orthography which would be suitably methodical for the reader to readily comprehend, whilst maintaining the conceptual elements of the language (Allan, 2002:251).

[†] The reason for its growing interest being in no small part due to Peter Jackson's films based on the trilogy, having reached close to $3 billion in box office figures.

For Tolkien, the Tengwar comprised of a group of related "signs" moreover an alphabet, each of which capable of being "adapted at choice or convenience to represent the consonants of languages" (Allan, 2002:241). The system is best known for its inclusion in the aforementioned appendices of The Lord of the Rings, where we find the underlying theory first explained. Each glyph, or *Tengwa*, represents a single phoneme and much like the systems before, digraphs and trigraphs were also represented by a single glyph, thus making use of the ligature associated with alphabets such as the Cyrillic. By comparison, the aesthetic qualities of the alphabet appear to be derived from Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit and the Nepalese Devanagari (Stenström, 2011:18).

The aforementioned appendices focus on what Tolkien spoke of as a "similar shape, similar sound" principle, that is to say, each Tengwa (or grapheme) corresponds to the articulated sound (or phoneme). This is achieved by assigning graphical attributes shared by the Tengwar with a corresponding mode or place of articulation. For example, a plosive grapheme is represented by a single bow, or lúva, and if articulated using the teeth, is extending from a (raised) stem, or telco. Both the bow and stem are dynamic attributes that permit a number of variations, which when combined allow a number of graphemes to be represented by the Tengwar.

Each Elvish writing system is by default organised into a table consisting of twenty-four cells, divided into four columns and six rows defining the place and mode of articulation respectively (below). The places of articulation are categorised into dental, labial, palatal and velar, indicating utterances which use either the lips, teeth, the hard palate (the tissue behind the front teeth) or

the soft palate (the tissue above the tongue behind the hard palate). The modes are divided into plosive, fricative, nasal and semi-vowel (or glide), with the plosives and fricatives further sub-categorised into voiced and voiceless. By cross-referencing a place and mode of articulation, we find the corresponding letter; for example, a voiced plosive which uses the teeth will be a /d/, or voiced dental plosive. Not all combinations will produce a phoneme used in English, and in some cases, not in Elvish, and in such circumstances the nearest alternative is used.

		POINTS OF ARTICULATION			
		dental	*labial*	*palatal*	*velar*
MODES OF ARTICULATION	*Plosives (voiceless)*	ρ	ρ	૧	૧
	Plosives (voiced)	ρͻ	ρͻ	cc૧	੩
	Fricatives (voiceless)	ħ	ħ	cl	cl
	Fricatives (voiced)	ħͻ	ħͻ	ccl	ccl
	nasals	ρͻ	ρͻ	cc૫	੩
	semivowels	ற	ற	ci	ci

This table was the foundation for which all subsequent writing systems were based, although variations occurred depending on the language represented. In the later Quenya mode for example, where the voiceless velar plosive (g) and aspirated voiceless velar plosive (kʰ) both occur, the latter takes the place of the (unused) voiceless velar fricative (ç) being the closest sounding phoneme.

Again, depending on the language represented, vowels are written in one of two ways. The first written as diacritics above the consonant Tengwa (known as *tehta* markings), and are used to represent short vowels (f*a*ther, ch*u*te); the same markings are also used for long vowels† (*a*rt, *u*niversity), but are written above a null value Tengwa known as a *vowel carrier*. These markings are used primarily for Quenya, and are referred to as tehta writing modes. The alternative sees the vowel written using separate Tengwar, thus occupying the same space as the consonants. This method is used exclusively for Sindarin, and is referred to as a full writing mode. Examples of both writing modes are shown below;

ejm̃ ó ċhó ẏ̌ǧn n̂ǫ̂m̂ʼm̂ı · m̂ íẏ̂m̂ẏ̂ ċ̌ǧ m̂ẏ́m̂ʼẏ́m̂

Yéni ve lintë yuldar avánier, mi oromardi lissë-miruvóreva

(The long years have passed like swift draughts, of the sweet mead in lofty halls)

c ʌ̄ɢpʌyʌɓ ɯ̨ıɢɓɷпıʌɢ ɓıɢıɓɣʌɒ pʌɷc ɒıyıʌɢ

A Elbereth Gilthoniel silivren penna míriel

(O Elbereth Starkindler white glittering slants down)

When using a tehta writing mode, the vowel markings can be placed above either the previous or following consonant, although some modes dictate that

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† Note that Sindarin uses vowels of a single backness, and therefore the length of the vowel is determined by the duration of the phoneme, unlike English phonology which categorises short and long vowels according to their backness; the front vowel (*a*pple, *i*gloo) being a short vowel and the back vowel (b*a*th, *i*sland) being the long vowel

only one of these two options is permissible. In either case, where there is no Tengwa available to carry the vowel, another vowel carrier is employed for this purpose (below right). This carrier is also shorter than the previous long vowel carrier in order to differentiate between the two uses. Diphthongs are also used in most orthographies created by Tolkien, the protocol for writing each are again dictated by the represented language. An example of each of the above methods is shown below using a Quenya tehta mode alphabet.

Vowel markings over preceding consonant	Vowel markings over following consonant	Use of vowel carrier in absence of Tengwa	Use of diphthong in place of vowel markings
"Matthew"	"Alison"	"Tolkien"	"Keith"
a e m th w	a i o l s n	o i e t l k n	e k i th

Syntactical mutations are also reflected in the orthography, for example, when a plosive is lenited (d>dh, p>ph), the resulting phoneme is then represented by the use of a unique Tengwa. In so doing, the reader is aware of the difference in the phonetic pronunciation. Examples are shown below using a Sindarin full-mode alphabet.

dol   fanui**dh**ol   **p**ant   ara**ph**ant

Further orthographic instances also result in embellishments of the Tengwar, such as the doubling of a consonant, or when a plosive is subjected to a secondary articulatory feature such as nasalisation. For example, when a /p/ is preceded by an /m/ (da**mp**), or a /d/ preceded by an /n/ (a**nd**), a tilde is placed above the plosive consonant (shown below). Similar features result in the same addition to the Tengwa, such as labialisation and palatisation, although the latter remains exclusive to the Quenya orthography.

ᵱ̃	ᵱ̃	ᵱ̃	ᵱ̃
nt	nd	mp	mb

Punctuation also forms a part of the Tengwar, but consists largely of a series of dots. The single dot marking resembles a space dot or interpunct (vertically centred dot), and is used for a comma whilst a double or triple dot is used to mark the end of sentence. Some alphabets also use a quadruple dot marking to signify the end of a document.

It is clear that the aspects of the Elvish orthographies and the associated alphabets demonstrate Tolkien's awareness of phonetic principles, and the importance that the they hold in graphemic aspects. It is also evident that he had a concise view of what he considered "specially pleasant", not only by establishing a phonemic harmony between the languages which inspired his own work, but having evidenced the contrary metaphorically in a language associated with stereotypically evil characters.

Conclusion

Before Tolkien's influence, the purpose of an invented language was to impact on the way that language itself was perceived, often with a view to proposing a superior means of communication; Zamenhof's Esperanto and Schleyer's

Volapük being the most prolific examples in terms of accepted audience. However, despite Tolkien's initial intentions for his languages, the recognition that Elvish and the notion of creating languages for fictional purposes has received since the publishing of The Lord of the Rings, has arguably resulted in linguistics almost becoming a prerequisite for the fantasy genre, both in the written word and motion picture.

The inherent detail of Tolkien's Elvish has undoubtedly become a factor for its success having become accessible to both linguists and fans alike. Unlike JK Rowling's *Parseltongue* or James Cameron's aforementioned *Na'vi*, Tolkien's Elvish was not created with an aspiration of commercial recognition, and arguably this absence of prospective limelight has also impacted on its recognition. But whilst the attraction that his work has to linguistics can be associated to Tolkien's attention to detail, how does this equate for those ignorant to the skills required to create such languages?

Those who are unable to appreciate Elvish, or any language, for its phonemic or syntactical proficiency, are reduced to a very limited means of comprehension. Rather than analysing the spoken word for use of vocalic structure, or the alphabet for suitably methodical graphemes, it is instead appreciated on the most primitive of levels; the way that it sounds. Having stated that Elvish was to be aesthetically pleasing, suffice to say that Tolkien was aware of this fact, but rather than piecing a language together from mere sounds, he experimented what he had previously experienced to represent pleasurable phonemic speech patterns. He then further engineered the results into what has become not only Tolkien's personal aesthetic, but of the many admirers of his work who seek to speak or write in the same way as the fictitious folk of Middle-earth.

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