

PHONETIC TRANSLATIONS IN ELVISH

Before the intricacies of the individual writing systems are explained in further detail, it is essential for the writer to understand that Elvish can be represented in two written formats - that of Latin origin or one of Tolkien's three glyph-based alphabets (see diagram II.22). The latter being used in the fictional context of Tolkien's world of Arda, and in most cases for aesthetic purposes, whilst the Latin equivalent being used to demonstrate the sounds of the languages through the use of existing phonetic recognition.

Nai Vardo eleni ilye lumenn!

Latin Elvish

ᚲᚢᚒ ᚱᚰᚵᚼ ᚱᚰᚲᚢ ᚒᚰᚱ ᚰᚰᚱᚲᚲ

Glyph-based Elvish (Cirth)

ᚱᚰᚱ ᚱᚰᚱ ᚱᚰᚱ ᚱᚰᚱ ᚱᚰᚱ

Glyph-based Elvish (Sarati)

ᚱᚰᚱ ᚱᚰᚱ ᚱᚰᚱ ᚱᚰᚱ ᚱᚰᚱ

Glyph-based Elvish (Tengwar)

II.22 – *The difference between Latin and glyph-based Elvish writing - translation reads “May all the stars of Varda shine on the hour of our reunion!”*

It must also be understood that both formats are phonetically exclusive; that is to say, the glyph based systems will represent digraphs and trigraphs using one symbol, whereas the Latin equivalent will adhere to what we understand of the English phonology, using letter combinations to represent one phoneme. Some of these examples are shown in diagram II:17, although as previously mentioned, Elvish uses a number of other combinations that will also be represented by a single glyph, depending on the language used. For example the /st/ in “**mista**” (“valley”) or the /nd/ in “**anduin**” (“great river”).

Although Tolkien wrote the title page to *The Lord of the Rings* in English using the Tengwar, he did not create an exclusive mode to write the English language. However, he did mention that an orthography could be compiled if desired, having stated that the title page was simply what *might* have been written by the Men of Gondor. But again, should we use only the rules adopted by Tolkien for writing the limited amount of words shown on the cover, the majority of subsequent vocabulary would invite ambiguity. Therefore, as a result of the limited orthographic detail for those using Tolkien's scripts to transliterate real-world languages, further questions are raised.

- Do I need to translate my non-Elvish script into Elvish before writing it using a glyph-based alphabet?
- Can I write my non-Elvish script using the relevant Elvish glyphs to represent each letter?
- Should I write the script using Elvish phonology, or adhere to phonemic structure of the original language?

The short answer to all of the above - it is your decision. Elvish is what is known as an artistic language (or *artlang*), meaning that it is recognised, more so than anything else, for its aesthetic appeal, meaning the graphical representation of the Tengwar in this respect takes precedence over any associated phonemic anomalies.

Whilst understanding that free choice pertains under the above circumstances, it is nonetheless largely accepted that the origin language should reflect how the transliteration is to be carried out in terms of the phonetic structure. That is to say, when writing an English script using any Elvish orthography, the *English* phonology should be used. For example, the

word “know” will be written using four glyphs - one for each letter, as opposed to one glyph for each phoneme (“n-o”). This is what is referred to as writing *orthographically*, as opposed to writing *phonetically*. However, the diagraphs, trigraphs, diphthongs and long vowels should be written using the orthography of the chosen Elvish language. For example the word “**choice**” has an initial /ch/ diagraph, and would therefore use the appropriate glyph to represent the digraph from the Elvish orthography, if available. The following diagram illustrates this concept showing how an English script would be written using an Elvish orthography.

One Ring to rule them all
ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ

One Ring to find them
ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ

One Ring to bring them all
ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ

and in the darkness bind them
ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ ᵛᵒᵛᵃ

II.23 – English scripts re-written using the Tengwar (Mode of Beleriand)

The process of translating from different languages, and how to approach the Elvish writing systems from an alternate phonetic structure is discussed further in the final part of this book. The following section marks the beginning of the Elvish orthographies, starting with the Sarati, the Cirth and other Starlight systems - following then with the Tengwar. Whilst there are benefits to be gleaned from familiarising yourself with all of the Elvish orthographies, there is no required order in which to do so.