

PROPOSED PHONEMIC TEHTAR MODE FOR ENGLISH

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October 2005

J.R.R. Tolkien himself, and many of his followers, have devised varying methods for writing English phonemically using tengwar and tehtar. I propose yet another, trying to keep it as simple and logical as possible, while at the same time not deviating overmuch from JRRT's usage. I trust that the viewpoint of a non-native speaker of English will be sufficiently bias-free.

In the following text, tengwar and tehtar will be designated either by their names or by descriptions, in SMALL CAPS.

CONSONANTS

I do not think there is much controversy about how to represent most of the consonant phonemes of English. The following list is almost a consensus among authors writing English phonemically with tengwar. There also seems to exist a consensus to the effect that a vowel-tehta is written on the tengwa for the following consonant.

STOPS

p PARMA	b UMBAR
t TINCO	d ANDO
k QUESSE	g UNGWE

FRICATIVES

f FORMEN	v AMPA	
þ THÚLE	ð ANTO	þ [<i>thorn</i>]; ð [<i>this</i>]
s SILME*	z ESSE*	* also nuquernar
ʃ AHA	ʒ ANCA	ʃ [<i>short</i>]; ʒ [<i>measure</i>]
h HYARMEN		

NASALS

m MALTA	n NÚMEN	ŋ NWALME	ŋ [<i>ring</i>]
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LIQUIDS

l LAMBE
r RÓMEN

AFFRICATES

tʃ CALMA	dʒ ANGA	tʃ [<i>check</i>]; dʒ [<i>job</i>]
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SEMIVOWELS

w VILYA	y ANNA	ɰ HWESTA SINDARINWA
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¹ This is the *r* sound that all speakers of English pronounce, as in *round* (initial) or *bright* (medial). On that *r* which is not necessarily pronounced by all, as in *there*, *for*, *tower*, see below.

² These are as in *wet, you*; not the -w and -y as final elements of diphthongs. On these latter, see Note 6 below.

³ The *wh* sound as in *which*, for those who pronounce this word differently from *witch*.

VOWELS AND DIPHTHONGS

The real controversy arises when it comes to representing the vowels and diphthongs (and triphthongs, in some pronunciations) of English. David Crystal, on p. 237 of *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, uses the system by British phonetician A.C.Gimson (*An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English*) and gives the words below to illustrate each sound. I propose the tengwar / tehtar uses at the end of each entry.

Amatehta and *unutehta* stand for a tehta above and below the tengwa respectively; unless otherwise indicated, all the tehtar proposed are amatehtar.

O-CURL^ˆ and U-CURL^ˆ denote curls open to the right and left respectively, as in normal Quenya mode, not as in the Ring-inscription, which is in Black Speech and inverts this use.

While it is not strictly true (phonetically speaking) that the vowels in *sea, calm, all, soon* are the respective "long" versions of those in *him, sat, dog, put*, writing those in the first group with a tehta on a LONG CARRIER *ĵ*, and those in the second group with a tehta on a consonant tengwa or a SHORT CARRIER *ı*, is clear enough and will cause no confusion to any reader. From a phonetic viewpoint, for instance, normal Modern English pronunciation uses no "long æ" (the long version of the vowel in *sat*). JRRT did use an INVERTED A-TEHTA[˘] (three dots in a triangle pointing downwards) for Anglo-Saxon æ, but, as explained, we do not have to use it; furthermore it does not exist in all tengwar fonts.

As an alternative, some tehtar given as "on long carrier" may be written double. This is possible with the DOT[˙], the O-CURL^ˆ and the U-CURL^ˆ; a double triangle of dots would be almost illegible, and impossible to write with most current tengwar fonts. The CIRCUMFLEX^ˆ, in Quenya spelling an alternative to the THREE DOTS^ˆ, has been adopted for the vowel in *sun* due to a similarity between this sound and a short *a*, and the availability of this tehta in most tengwar fonts.

VOWELS

[shown on carrier or *ĵ*]

<i>sea, feet, me, field</i>	i: DOT ON LONG CARRIER <i>ĵ</i>
<i>him, big, village, women</i>	ɪ DOT <i>ĵ</i>
<i>get, fetch, head, Thames</i>	e ACUTE ACCENT <i>ĵ</i>
<i>sat, hand, ban, plait</i>	æ THREE DOTS IN TRIANGLE POINTING UP <i>ĵ</i>
<i>sun, son, blood, does</i>	ʌ CIRCUMFLEX ACCENT <i>ĵ</i>
<i>calm, are, father, car</i>	ɑ: THREE DOTS IN TRIANGLE POINTING UP ON LONG CARRIER <i>ĵ</i>
<i>dog, lock, swan, cough</i>	ɒ O-CURL <i>ĵ</i>
<i>all, saw, cord, more</i>	ɔ: O-CURL ON LONG CARRIER <i>ĵ</i>
<i>put, wolf, good, look</i>	ʊ U-CURL <i>ĵ</i>
<i>soon, do, soup, shoe</i>	u: U-CURL ON LONG CARRIER <i>ĵ</i>

bird, her, turn, learn

3: LONG CARRIER + ÓRE ɹ̥⁴

the, butter, sofa, about

ə UNUTEHTA DOT OR SHORT CARRIER ɹ̥⁵

DIPHTHONGS⁶

ape, waist, they, say

eɪ YANTA + ACUTE ACCENT ʌ́

time, cry, die, high

aɪ YANTA + THREE DOTS IN TRIANGLE POINTING UP ʌ̣

boy, toy, noise, voice

ɔɪ YANTA + O-CURL ʌ̣

so, road, toe, know

əʊ ÚRE + O-CURL ʊ̣

out, how, house, found

aʊ, ɔʊ ÚRE + THREE DOTS IN TRIANGLE POINTING UP ʊ̣

deer, here, fierce, near

ɪə ÓRE + DOT ɪ̣

care, air, bare, bear

eə ÓRE + ACUTE ACCENT ɪ́

poor, sure, tour, lure

ʊə ÓRE + U-CURL ʊ̣

⁴ This is a long vowel (reason for the LONG CARRIER ɹ̥) that does not occur in any other context, followed – in some pronunciations – by an *r* sound (reason for ÓRE ɹ̥).

⁵ The UNUTEHTA DOT, also called *unuticse* (wrongly spelled *nuntixë* in the published *Etymologies*) signifies the "colourless" vowel denoted by schwa, and may also be used under syllabic consonants, as in *vowel*, *common*, *bottom*. A SHORT CARRIER ɹ̥ should be used in word-initial position, as in *about*.

⁶ This supposes – not too accurately, but closely enough for practical purposes – that English diphthongs are composed of a vowel plus a final element equivalent to one of the semivowels *w* or *y*; these latter are therefore written as ÚRE ʊ̣ and YANTA ʌ̣ respectively.

Triphthongs formed by adding schwa to the *-w* or *-y* diphthongs (such as in *player*, *fire*, *lower*, *tower*) are spelled with a final ÓRE ɹ̥.