
Linguistic Foolery All About Accents!

By Darth Fingon

This column is short, mostly because I'm writing it on October 31st and have to take the Elfings to a pumpkin carving party in an hour and a half. As you can see, I'm already trying to pad it out and fill up space by mentioning stuff that is in no way relevant to the topic.

Of Tolkien's languages that appear within the timeframe of *The Silmarillion*, all are riddled with accent marks and special characters. Valarin is the worst offender, offering up such wonderful words as *Ibrîniðilpathânezêl* (which means 'Telperion'). Adûnaic is not far behind with gems along the lines of *Yôzâyan* ('Land of Gift') and *Adûnâim* ('Númenoreans' or 'Westerners'). Khuzdul follows Adûnaic with the likes of *Khazad-dûm*, and all of us are familiar with Quenya's *Fëanáro* and Sindarin's *Lúthien*.

So what do those accent marks mean and how are they pronounced? To start things off in the most confusing way possible, one needs to understand that acute (á) and circumflex (â) accents in Tolkien's languages both mean essentially the same thing: a long vowel. So forget everything you've learned about accents in other languages. A Tolkienian accent means nothing more than a stretched-out vowel.

Valarin, Adûnaic, Khuzdul, and Quenya all use either one or the other to mark their long vowels (Quenya uses acute; the others use circumflex). Sindarin uses both. How lucky for us! In Sindarin, there is a minor distinction between the circumflex and acute accents. Sindarin circumflex accents appear most often in single-syllable words to mark long vowels that are pronounced with a little extra stress. When these words with circumflex accents are made into compounds, the circumflex will either become acute or disappear altogether. (See: *dûn* -> *Dúnadan* and *gûr* -> *guren*.) In Sindarin writing, no distinction is made between what we write as a circumflex versus what we write as an acute.

The diaeresis (ä, ë, ö) appears only in Quenya, and its function is to mark vowels that must be pronounced separately rather than assimilated into a diphthong or ignored completely. The *ë* in *Fëanáro* serves to remind us that *ëa* is pronounced as two separate sounds: *fe-a*, rather than *fee* to rhyme with English *mean*. An *ë* at the end of a word serves the same purpose, whether it stands alone (*Valinóreë*) or with an *i* (*Amárië*). In both of these cases, the *e* needs to be pronounced as its own distinct letter: *va-li-nó-re* and *a-má-ri-e*.

In Quenya, a vowel with diaeresis will never appear by itself at the beginning or in the middle of a word. It will always show up together with another vowel (*Eärwen*) or at the end of the word (*Alqualondë*). Something like *Lairëwen* will never occur, no matter how nice it may look as a name for your OFC. Final *ë* always becomes plain old *e* when it ceases to be final by way of compounds.

Now, are we ready to confuse things up another notch? Okay, good. Here goes. None of these accents actually exists in the writing styles preferred by the speakers of those languages.

The Silmarillion Writers' Guild Reference Library

http://www.silmarillionwritersguild.org/reference/linguistic_foolery/all-about-accents.php

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The accents exist only to facilitate transcription into Roman typography, and also to make things look prettier. The Quenya diaeresis, to start things off, does not exist in any way, shape, or form when writing with tengwar. *Eärendil* would be written *Earendil*; *Eönwë* would be written *Eonwe*; *Mëassë* would be written *Measse*. All the *ë*, *ä*, or *ö* does is remind non-native Elvish speakers (that is, all of us) using the Roman alphabet that these letters need to be pronounced separately. A native Quenya speaker would, presumably, already know that. It is therefore equally correct to write *Feanáro* as it is to write *Fëanáro* in your epic Noldolantë (or Noldolante, if you prefer) fanfiction. Diaereses are for show only. And to keep canatics from whining at you that you spelled *Fëanáro* wrong and 'don't-you-know-it-has-an-accent-over-the-E?'

Long vowels in cirth are represented not by accent marks but by entirely different runes: the letter *û* in cirth is not *u* with an accent, but something separate on its own, representing a related but ultimately distinct sound. The Roman alphabet does not have enough letters to accurately transcribe words written in cirth, so accent marks must be used. In tengwar, which do not have specific letters to represent vowels in the Quenya mode, short vowels (a, e, i, o, u) are written with a short carrier topped by a vowel tehta OR the vowel tehta over a consonant, while long vowels (*á*, *é*, *í*, *ó*, *ú*) are written with a long carrier topped by the same vowel tehta OR the tehta doubled over the consonant. The Quenya tengwar mode makes it far more obvious that an accent denotes a doubled vowel. It is therefore acceptable to write out a doubled vowel s if you want to avoid accents: *Feanaaro*, *Valinoore*, *Nuumenoore*. This does, however, look a bit stupid for fanfiction purposes, and will inevitably confuse and infuriate readers.