
Linguistic Foolery

Elven Families and What They Wore

By Darth Fingon

A while back on a writing discussion board, a question arose about Elvish families and the words they would use for different relatives. That is, would the Elves, who seem to like making up exact words for everything they encounter, have a specific title for a third cousin once removed on the mother's side, or would said third cousin once removed be simply referred to as 'kinsman', as we often see in Tolkien's writing? In addition to this question, people were interested to know if any words for relatives outside of the immediate family existed, as available Elvish wordlists only ever seem to provide the usual father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister. Are there words for grandparents and cousins? Well, read on to question one.

Second, I was asked by a reader of last month's column to research any possible words for Elven underoos, so check out question two for words related to clothing.

As with last month, all of the words provided here are from Tolkien's earliest wordlists and as such are not necessarily compatible with the later, refined versions of Sindarin and Quenya. Therefore, as with the words from last month, I do not recommend using any of these in works of fanfiction.

Also, as with last month, a G before a word indicates that it is Gnomish (pre-Sindarin), while a Q indicates Quenya. Now on to the questions.

1) Do Elves have specific words for various extended family members, or is everyone just 'kinsman'?

Well, it just turns out that the answer is yes to both of those scenarios. There are specific words for various extended family members, but at the same time, there are also words like 'kinsman' that are hazier in their distinction, and words for 'cousin' that can be applied not only to actual cousins, but also to anyone you might be related to somehow.

Grandparents and Ancestors

Most people are familiar with the words *adar* and *atar*, meaning 'father'. Another word for 'father', G *eithog/eithweg*, also mean 'ancestor' in a more generic sense. Similarly, G *mavwen/mafwyn/mavuïn* means both 'mother' and 'ancestress'. G *mam* means both 'grandmother' and 'mother'. But G *dâd* is listed as meaning only 'grandfather'. The Q words for 'grandfather' and 'grandmother', *haru* and *haruni*, likewise do not have any other meaning.

Grandchildren

The most generic words are G *bôr* ('descendant', presumably male), Q *yondo* ('male descendant', 'great-grandson', 'grandson'), and Q *hilmî* ('descendants', 'offspring'). Other listed

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words for grandchildren are more specific: Q *súyon* means 'grandson', but that grandson has to be the son of one's daughter. G *sion* is listed as 'grandson' with no distinction as to whether this is a daughter's son or a son's son, but because of its similarity to both *súyon* and the G word for 'daughter' *suil*, it's possible that the title of *sion* is restricted to a daughter's son only. Its female equivalent, 'granddaughter', is G *siel*. Also related is the prefix G *si-* or *sin-*, meaning 'granddaughter of'. 'Grandson of' is G *ho-* or *hon-*.

Niece and Nephew

In addition to meaning 'grandson', Q *súyon* is also listed as 'nephew', with a similar restriction: it means only the son of one's sister. Another word for 'nephew' is Q *fion*, which also means 'son'. Similar-sounding G *fwion* also only means 'sister's son', and G *fwîr* means only 'sister's daughter'. Both of these are related to the feminine patronymic prefix G *fwî-*. No words are listed to indicate what a brother's son might be called, but something similar to *fwion* and *fwîr* could be improvised using the male patronymic prefix G *go-* or *gon-*.

Cousins and Kinsmen

This category has the most words by far. Let's start with the closest and work our way out.

Related to the words G *hethos* and *hethir* ('brother' and 'sister' respectively), we have words for male and female first cousins: G *hethren* and *hethres*. Also related to these words is G *hethrin*, which means (in relation to brothers and sisters) 'having both parents the same' or (in relation to cousins) 'having two grandparents the same'. We also have G *goredhweg*, 'male cousin', and *goredhwin*, 'female cousin'. On the Qenya side there are *ettani*, *ettaresse*, *resse* ('female cousin') and *ettanu*, *ettarendo*, *ettaréro*, *rendo*, *réro* ('male cousin'). Also the first non-gender-specific word of the lot: Q *etta*, 'cousin'.

The words for 'second cousin' are G *gedren* (male) and G *gedres* (female), related to the word G *ged*, meaning 'kinsman' (and also 'friend'). G *ress* means both 'female cousin' and 'female relative'; its male counterpart is G *ren(d)*. Similarly, the words Q *resse* ('female cousin'), *rendo*, and *réro* ('male cousin') listed above can also mean 'kinswoman' or 'kinsman' in a more generic sense. A final word for 'blood kinsman' is G *nosied*.

Uncle and Aunt

No words could be found in this category.

In-Laws

Only two words exist in this category: G *bedhren* ('brother in law' or 'kinsman by marriage') and G *bedhres* ('sister in law'). Both of these words are related to G *bedhin*, 'married', and *bedhri*, 'wedding'. No Q equivalents are given, but we do have Q *vestanoina*, 'related by marriage'.

2) Would Elves have worn underwear, and is there a word for it?

Whether or not Elves would have worn underroos is a debate beyond the scope of this lowly linguistics article, but I can answer the question about whether or not a word exists. And the answer to that is, alas, no. I looked through all my sources and could find nothing at all to do with undergarments. In fact, I found remarkably few clothing words at all. So I'll just list all the early Elvish words for clothing in order to make the answer to this question look longer and more thorough.

baith - clothes, garment, dress (G)

gwab - garment (G)

baithri - clothing (G)

bacha - jacket, coat (G)

habin - shoe (G)

habach - wooden shoe (G)

vaima - robe (Q)

patinka - slipper, shoe (Q)

laupe - tunic, shirt (Q)

qilta - belt (Q)

Apart from a few more words for jewellery pieces, and words for weaving and knitting, that's it as far as Elvish clothing goes. Tolkien was rather vague on this subject.