
Linguistic Foolery

'Sindarin' is a Quenya Word: how the clan names make Elvish more confusing

By Darth Fingon

Last month's article looked at the differences between Sindarin and Quenya, and when each would be the appropriate language to use. This month will take that same idea a little further and expand on the Sindarin vs Quenya smackdown. Because while the vast majority of the character and place names given in Tolkien's works are in Sindarin, there's one category where Quenya wins hands down. And that category is Names of the Kindreds of the Elves.

Everyone who reads and writes Silm fic is familiar with words like Sindar, Noldor, Vanyar, Teleri, Nandor, and Avari. What these words have in common, apart from the obvious fact that they're names of Elven kindreds, is that they're all Quenya words. Throughout *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien uses these Quenya terms to describe his Elves, thus setting the standard for Quenya in narrative. But problems can arise when you need to use these descriptors in dialogue or tight POV. Realistically, a Sindarin Elf will not refer to himself or his speech as 'Sindarin'; this word does not exist in his language. He'd have to say something else.

Fair warning before going any further on this: as with all in-story Elvish, there's a fine line between being right and being a pretentious goon. While it would be hypocritical for me to say 'just use the familiar Quenya', since that's the exact opposite of what I always advocate, I also think it's a little silly to pepper one's writing with an overabundance of the lesser-known Sindarin terms to the point that most readers will be running to the glossary every few lines. My personal preference is to write around these words and use other descriptors as much as possible, thus eliminating the need to decide between being logically correct and being widely understood. (I should also admit that when people ask me whether they should use Sindarin or Quenya in a given scenario, my usual answer is 'English'.)

Sindar

Oddly enough, there is no exact Sindarin word for 'Sindarin'. The Sindarin Elves were known to call their language simply *edhellen*, 'Elvish' and themselves *edhil*, 'Elves'. The term *sindar* was given them by the Noldorin exiles. However, sometimes *edhellen* will not work in your scenario, especially if your story deals with more than one type of Elf and more than one Elvish language. In this case, it's possible to directly translate the Quenya words and make new Sindarin terms.

Singular: Sinda -> Thinnel, from *thind* (grey) plus *el* (Elf), modelled after *glinnel* below.

Plural: Sindar -> Thinnil

Collective: Sindalië -> Thindrim

Adjective: Sindarin -> Thindren

The Silmarillion Writers' Guild Reference Library

http://www.silmarillionwritersguild.org/reference/linguistic_foolery/sindarin-is-a-quenya-word.php

© Darth Fingon

The collective can be roughly translated as 'people of the Sindar' and should not be confused with the plural. This problem arises frequently in Lord of the Rings stories involving the word *Galadhrim*, which unfortunately is only attested in the collective form. Keep in mind that the suffixes Q *lië* and S *rim* will refer only to a group of people as a whole, making it inappropriate to use in sentences like 'Four *Thindrim* arrived in Nevrast yesterday'. In this situation, the regular plural should be used.

David Salo's book *A Gateway to Sindarin* lists sg *send* cl *sendrim* as words for the Sindar used by the Noldor, but I've been unable to find these on other wordlists. They may appear in newer sources (no provenance is listed). In any case, *send* looks like a Noldorin sound-only Sindarinisation of Q *sinda* rather than a translation based on existing Sindarin words: the A in *sinda* causes the I to shift to E; the A is then dropped. *Sinda* -> *Senda* -> *Send*. If this is true, the Sindar would not use these terms, being that they're Noldorin inventions and not 'real' words.

(So I say now, having no idea where these words come from. Just watch; now somebody will write in and prove me spectacularly wrong.)

Anyhow, one attested Sindarin word applied to Sindarin Elves is *iathrim*: a collective for Elves of Doriath. A possible singular would be *iathel* (pl *iathil* adj *iathren*). The longer form *Doriathrim* should also be possible.

Noldor

'Noldor' appears to be the only one of the well known terms that is actually used by the group it names. There are Sindarin words for the Noldor, and they are as follows:

Singular: Noldo -> Golodh or Gódhel
 Plural: Noldor -> Gelydh or Gódhil
 Collective: Noldolië -> Golodhrim or Gódhellim
 Adjective: Noldorin -> Golodhren or Gódhellen

The word *ódhel* (pl *ódhil* cl *ódhellim* adj *ódhellen*) is also listed for Noldo. Strictly speaking it means 'any Elf of Aman', though it became more associated with the Noldor due to the fact that these were the Elves the Sindar met in Beleriand. The Quenya equivalent, *oarel* or *aurel* (pl *oareldi* cl *oarellië* adj *oareldin*), retains the meaning of 'any Elf of Aman' (that is, a Noldo or Vanya).

Vanyar

The singular and plural words are attested; the collective and adjective are guesses on my part based on patterns observed elsewhere:

Singular: Vanya -> Miniel
 Plural: Vanyar -> Mínil

Collective: Vanyalië -> Midhrim

Adjective: Vanyarin -> Midhren

The Quenya and Sindarin terms do not have corresponding meanings. Q *vanya* means 'beautiful one' while S *miniel* means something like 'Elf of the first clan'. Direct translations would give Q *minya* for 'Elf of the first clan' (pl *minyar* cl *minyallië* adj *minyarin*) and possibly something from the word *bain* (beautiful) in Sindarin. The Vanyar did not call themselves Vanyar, but used the *min-* terms.

Teleri

Several different terms exist to describe Teleri, since these Elves did not necessarily use the word in reference to themselves. *Teleri* means 'hindmost'; they preferred the term *Lindar*, meaning 'singers'. Quenya and Sindarin words are listed in corresponding order:

Singular: Teler or Linda -> Teler or Glinnel

Plural: Teleri or Lindar -> Telir or Glinnil

Collective: Telellië or Lindalië -> Telerrim or Glindrim

Adjective: Telerin or Lindarin -> Telerren or Glindren

Additionally, a few more Sindarin words exist: *eglan* or *egol* means 'forsaken one', and is used by those Teleri who were left behind in Beleriand (pl *eglain* or *egyl*, cl *egladhrim* or *eglath*, adj *egladhren* or *egollen*). The collective term *falathrim* also exists for shore-dwelling Elves, with a possible singular form being *falassel* (pl *felessil* adj *falathren*). In the language of the Teleri of Aman, they called themselves sg *linda* pl *lindai* cl *lindálië* adj *lindárin*.

Nandor

This name comes from roots meaning 'against' or 'back', referring to those who turned back on the journey from Cuiviénen. The Nandor do not call themselves Nandor, but rather, like the Teleri, use the term 'singers': *Lindi*. Therefore the *Lin-* and *Glin-* words listed under Teleri could probably be used when referring to the Nandor in a politically correct way.

Singular: Nando -> Danel

Plural: Nandor -> Denil

Collective: Nandolië -> Danwaith is attested; Danath and Dadhrim are other possibilities.

Adjective: Nandorin -> Dadhren

Nandor were also called *laiquendi*, 'green elves' in Quenya (sg *laiquendë* cl *laiquendelië* adj *laiquendarin*, though I would hesitate to use the cl and adj forms on account of how they sound ridiculous), for which the Sindarin words are sg *laegel* pl *laegil* cl *laegrin* adj *laegren*. The Nandorin words are sg *lind* pl *lindi* cl *lindas* (adj unknown).

The Silmarillion Writers' Guild Reference Library

http://www.silmarillionwritersguild.org/reference/linguistic_foolery/sindarin-is-a-quenya-word.php

© Darth Fingon

Avari

Another word that is not used by the group it names, Avari means 'refusers': those who refused to leave Cuiviénen. The Avari naturally did not think of themselves in this way.

Singular: Avar -> Avar

Plural: Avari -> Evair

Collective: Avallië -> Avarrim

Adjective: Avarin -> Avarren

A few Avarin words are listed in War of the Jewels. All of them are words the Avari used to name themselves, presumably in different dialects, and all mean roughly 'people'.

Quendi and Eldar

I'll be brief with this one because the terms are already explained in much greater detail by Tolkien himself (see 'Quendi and Eldar' in WJ, which is whence most of these clan names come). The word *quendi* (sg *quendë*) has no real Sindarin equivalent. The Sindarin word *pen* meaning 'person' is related, but is not an exact match (it corresponds rather to Q *quen*). The usual words to describe an Elf in everyday language, though, are Q *elda* and S *edhel*.

Singular: Elda -> Edhel

Plural: Eldar -> Edhil

Collective: Eldalië -> Edhellim

Adjective: Eldarin -> Edhellen

WJ lists more words than these for describing Elves in general; I won't go into them here since they are readily available there. Several of the descriptors listed therein are ones that have clear English translations for those who want to avoid using Elvish terms. Words for Light Elves, Dark Elves, and West Elves can all be found.