

## LANGUAGES IN ROLE-PLAYING

Frankly, managing even a few foreign languages in such a way as to create a suitable 'air' of the strange and wonderful, and the sense that these languages actually exist is a task sufficient to daunt a philologist. Trying to foster a pretence results in unsatisfactory or laughable results. The creator of the work has a duty to do his homework and avoid giving the impression that he has no clue what he is about. Sensible language and pronunciation form a structure that is often unappreciated, but the absence of a well-thought out system of language and pronunciation seems to be quickly detected, and the creator is bought rapidly to account. The fact that many people do not appreciate the structure does not excuse the effort. It is altogether too easy to bring oneself and one's colleagues to ill-repute by failing to understand the nuances of good language in the context of a properly thought out structure.

The use of foreign language is a sometimes-inconvenient necessity when dealing with foreigners. After all, the notion that everyone speaks 'common' and that it looks a lot like English, is unbelievably convenient. This kind of convenience detracts from any role-playing experience. Logical and intriguing language structures can add a level to the overall experience. After all, think how dull the scene at the gate of *Moria* would have been if the Elven word for 'friend' happened to be 'friend'. Professor Tolkien was no man's fool. He developed multiple languages and laid out long tracts and thousands of 'snippets' of foreign speech in his work, and the reader's experience is much the richer. Even so, there will be a few who do not appreciate the effort and will ignore the poetry and elven speech, and there may even be some who put the work down out of impatience.

We do not have to present work *in* these foreign tongues; that might be seen as self-aggrandisement, but we *do* need to create the impression that we could if we wanted to. Ultimately, we do have to present a vast number of foreign names, and we also need to convince the reader that we know what these words mean. The only way to do this is to actually know what they mean.

Very few people want a world with place names like 'West Hamlet', 'Green Wood', 'North Upton', or 'Silly Ford'. This kind of name is too 'familiar', and does not elevate one's mood to the proper suspension of disbelief one needs to be an effective role-player. The only logical alternative is to translate these mundane names into the world's foreign languages, and for the very few who actually like the sound of 'West Hamlet' we can actually tell them what the foreign words mean. Ultimately, if one is visiting France, one actually appreciates the fact that the signs are in French... that's how you know you're abroad and not in downtown Cincinnati.

When I created Hârn between 1977 and 1983, I also began the creation of the Hârnic language. I am no philologist, but I am rather good at English, and I do seem to have a 'feel' for words and the ability to make up satisfying names. I expect that the constitution of a 'satisfying name' is a rather esoteric matter where no two

folk would agree. However, I think we *could* agree that *Terénia*, sounds nice, *Wompum* sounds silly, and *Mrakatakatakatak* sounds downright unpleasant. It is not that we have to religiously avoid silly or unpleasant nomenclature, it's just that it is distracting, and can be annoying and embarrassing if there is too much of it about.

Unfortunately, I was remiss in that I did not at that time write down the meanings of the words I created, the constraint of time, forced me to leave them in my sadly inadequate head. I may have known that *ráyesh* meant *breast* and that *védo* meant *west*, but I neglected to create a concordance that would have permitted others to convincingly expand the work. This greatly limited would-be contributors. In recent years, I have been obliged to create extensive dictionaries for this very purpose, and because my sadly chemically befuddled brain has lost much of its previously exalted function (at least I presume it was exalted, I no longer have the wit to judge).

Ultimately, it is *much* easier to name the settlements in a district if one actually knows the words for north, east, south, west, upper, lower, fort, crossing, and so on. The more words one knows, the better. When one runs out of words, one has to resort to the creation of 'nonsense', and it is amazing how quickly people perceive the nonsense and become willing to give up their participation.

How many foreign words do we need?

This is a more complicated question that it seems at first glance. To carry out a conversation, one needs perhaps 500 words, but we are not carrying out conversations at this point.

For a large region, we need some basic geographical terms, the kinds of word that would appear on any regional map. Words like: bay, gulf, river, island, islands, mountains, hills, lake, woods, forest, marsh, north, south, east and west, strait, sea, ocean, cape/point, and the like. On a regional map, the basic geographical terms account for maybe a couple of dozen words.

Will people complain when we 'purge' English from our regional map? Certainly, a few will complain loudly and frequently that we are making the map unintelligible. Oddly, they don't complain when National Geographic does the same thing, or when Tolkien writes Amon Sul, or Anduin on his maps. The outcry is disturbing and may seem hurtful and extraordinarily unfair, as if we were imposing a great burden on the objectors, but on the other hand, there seem to be at least as many quiet folk who express their appreciation with our consistency.

Ultimately, if all the bays/gulfs are labelled 'wyn' it's pretty clear that 'wyn' might be the word for bay, and if all the lakes are labelled 'nen' then it's not too much of a stretch to work that out either. Do we *have* to use the local language on the maps? Of course not. We can use a mixture of English or even all English. It's just not as satisfying. There are three possibilities:

- (1) Rayésa Êrd
- (2) Rayésa Mountains
- (3) Breasts Mountains.

Option (3) is consistent, but looks silly and has no value in terms of creating the mood we need for fantasy.

Option (2) is inconsistent. Why on earth would anyone use such a hodgepodge just to avoid the word Êrd?

Option (1) has balance and consistency that a philologist might appreciate. For those who prefer options 2 or 3, we provide a translation. They can call the Rayésha Êrd whatever they like to call it. But *honestly*, who would want to call the *Grand Tetons* the Big Tits?

The right use of foreign words has the power to elevate the sense of what we are looking at — to truly convey the *essential notion* that we are looking at a foreign place and not a district of Northumbria or a county in Texas.

I'm probably suffering from chemical imbalances, but I cannot understand someone who is fine with Káldór, Orbáal, Thârda, Mèlderýn, and Chybísa, but goes nuts if we write Rayésha Êrd, Edêr Wyn, or Elnâr Derýn.

Ultimately the use of foreign language in our publications is a matter of fine balance. We have to create 'mood' while staying intelligible. Ultimately, since I am the creator of the material, I have the responsibility (the duty even) to make sure the balance suits my sense of what's 'right'. To make this kind of decision, I can invite opinion, but I cannot abrogate the responsibility. Mine is the credit. Mine is the blame.



## PRONUNCIATION OF FOREIGN WORDS

Ever since I created Hârn, Ivínia, Shôrkýnè Trierzôn, and Kèthíra as a whole, *all* of the publications have been brimming with foreign words, and people have been having difficulty pronouncing them.

When I create a word and write it down, I know exactly what it should sound like, but Roman script is short a few vowels and maybe even a few consonants to make things truly clear. If I write 'a' someone who doesn't know what I meant, might pronounce it as in fat, far or nape. One is reminded of the old riddle that points out the ludicrous nature of English pronunciation (and requires so much rote work of us): 'How does one spell fish? GHOTI: GH as in enough, O as in women, TI as in ignition.'

It is hard to imagine a foreign language that offers as many different ways to screw up the spelling and pronunciation as English. The reason English is so hard to learn is that we have to learn most of it by rote. Certainly there are a few rules, quite a lot of rules actually, but rules also need to be learned by rote.

How much does it matter that we provide a pronunciation guide? Well to some people it doesn't matter at all and to some it matters a lot. I have spent half an hour on the phone trying to understand a Hârníc word someone was saying on the other end of the line, finally having to get the individual on the other end to spell it out. The clue here is that it may not matter at all until you want to speak to someone else, possibly someone else with a reasonable knowledge of 'Hârníc' etc., someone else who might be confused or even amused by your pronunciation. Imagine the time it would take to have a conversation if you needed to spell out every other word.

This, the desire to communicate with others, together with the basic desire of many if not most Hârn-lovers to 'get it right', establishes a real need for 'standard pronunciation', even if a significant fraction of the audience chooses to use their own 'style'.

I published my first pronunciation guide a long time ago, in 1987. Not many people got to read it, so I'm making a new version available now.

Bearing this in mind, in transcribing Kèthíran names we have tried to simulate local pronunciation with the Roman alphabet. The Latin script is not always up to the task, but we try.

There are certain conventions of pronunciation that, while they are not universal, may help the reader in simulating local Kèthíran pronunciation. This is my attempt to explain the nature of 'standard pronunciation' within the pages of my creations.



Symbol	Value
<b>aa, å</b>	<i>ar</i> as in <i>far</i> or <i>car</i> , usually sustained longer than most vowels.
<b>a</b>	usually soft as in <i>car</i> , sometimes hard as in <i>that</i> . Not sustained as long as <i>aa</i> or <i>å</i> .
<b>ai, ei</b>	usually pronounced <i>eye</i> .
<b>ae</b>	each vowel is sounded, usually as a long <i>a</i> and short soft <i>e</i> : Hence Pagàèlin is sounded Pah-gay-e-lin.
<b>æ</b>	Most often pronounced as <i>ay</i> in <i>pay</i> , less often (and less correctly) as <i>ee</i> or <i>y</i> .
<b>c</b>	hard as in <i>cat</i> ( <i>never</i> soft as in <i>fleece</i> ). Sometimes <i>ch</i> (hard).
<b>ch, c</b>	hard as in <i>chicken</i> , never soft as in <i>ship</i> .
<b>cc</b>	as hard <i>ch</i> (only southern languages)
<b>dh</b>	'soft' <i>th</i> as in <i>there</i> .
<b>e</b>	usually short/soft as in <i>pen</i> or <i>help</i> . When appearing in the terminal position, semi-sounded as <i>e</i> as in <i>fey</i> or <i>echo</i> , but <i>never</i> silent.
<b>ee</b>	should be read as <i>y</i> (probably should be written that way too)
<b>g</b>	always hard as in <i>golf</i> .
<b>i</b>	usually short as in <i>chicken</i> sometimes, especially when occurring as the last/terminal vowel, as <i>ee</i> or <i>y</i> (eg. <i>Ski</i> )
<b>ia</b>	as a medial or terminal combination this is usually pronounced <i>ee-ah</i> as in <i>media</i> .
<b>iu</b>	pronounced <i>ee-uh</i> as in <i>tedium</i> .
<b>j</b>	The Ivínians always, and other northern peoples sometimes pronounce this as <i>y</i> ; otherwise it is pronounced as in <i>Jam</i> .
<b>ll</b>	pronounced as in Welsh (approx. <i>hl</i> ).
<b>o</b>	usually short as in <i>opera</i> , rarely it is long as in <i>phone</i> . It is <i>never</i> doubled is in <i>spoon</i> .
<b>ø, oe</b>	<i>oe</i> as in the Danish <i>øst</i> (east)
<b>ou</b>	usually pronounced as <i>oo</i> .
<b>qu</b>	pronounced <i>kw</i> as in <i>queen</i> . <i>kw</i> is preferred.
<b>q</b>	when <i>q</i> occurs without a <i>q</i> , it is pronounced <i>k</i> .
<b>s</b>	pronounced hard as in <i>pass</i> . <i>Rarely</i> , in the terminal position it is softened to a <i>z</i> sound.
<b>ss</b>	rare and indicates a particularly long sounded <i>s</i> (or a mistake on the part of the writer).
<b>th</b>	always hard as in <i>thought</i> , never soft as in <i>then</i> (see <i>dh</i> )
<b>u</b>	usually pronounced <i>uh</i> as in <i>ugly</i> ; sometimes <i>oo</i> as in <i>spoon</i> .
<b>w</b>	northern peoples often, but not always pronounce this as <i>v</i> .
<b>x</b>	as an initial letter, this is interchangeable with <i>z</i> (as in <i>xylophone</i> ). As a medial or terminal letter it is pronounced <i>ks</i> as in <i>box</i> .
<b>y</b>	pronounced as a short double <i>e</i> as in <i>empty</i> , very occasionally as <i>i</i> , never as <i>ai</i> as in <i>sky</i> . Hence <i>Mèlderýn</i> is pronounced <i>Mel-der-eeen</i> .
<b>zh</b>	More like <i>j</i> than <i>z</i> , as in the name of the Russian general <i>zhukov</i> .

## IMPORTANT NOTES

- ❖ **There are no silent letters in any Kèthìran languages.** Hence, if "*thane*" were a Hâmic word, it would be pronounced *thar-ne* not *thayn* as it would in English.
- ❖ **The 'Magic e' does not apply in any Kèthìran Language.** In English a terminal *e* has the effect of lengthening the preceding vowel, such that adding an *e* to the end of '*ban*' turns it into '*bayn*'; this does not happen in any Kèthìran language.
- ❖ **Terminal vowels are always pronounced,** although rarely with much strength.
- ❖ **Double consonants** (FF, NN, etc.) generally appear only as a result of translator error and/or for 'effect'. They should be treated as single consonants.

The table on the left was first published in 1984, and is not much changed except for the addition of two new letters. Needless to say, there may be more notes coming as the development of Kèthìran languages progresses.

## ACCENTS

Accent: 1: an articulative effort giving prominence to one syllable over adjacent syllables. 2: a mark used in writing or printing to indicate a specific sound value, stress, or pitch, to distinguish words otherwise identically spelled, or to indicate that an ordinarily mute vowel should be pronounced. People with different accents might use an accent mark to indicate they accent a different syllable.<sup>1</sup>

I have *always* written Hárnic words with accents, and they have generally been removed (without my permission) by editors who did not understand them.

The purpose of an accent is to help the reader with pronunciation by indicating syllabic stress.

English/Roman has had most of its accents purged, and this contributes to the fact that English is, arguably, the world's most difficult language to learn. A foreigner looking at English generally has no clue how to pronounce words. To an English-speaker, Hárnic words are foreign. This might seem to imply that a few accents might be helpful. After all, one can only get so far with the "if only it were English" method.

Now, while it may not really matter very much, I have heard Mèlderýn pronounced at least four different ways. I suppose that any three syllable word could be pronounced six different ways depending on the primary and secondary stress (and this does not take into account the different ways that vowels can be sounded, although that should be taken care of by the original article above). If accents are added: Melderyn becomes Mèlderýn — secondary stress on the first syllable and primary stress on the third. The closest we can come to simulating this without accents (using italics and ALLCAPS to emulate the effects) is: *mel-der-REEN*. This seems far less aesthetically pleasing than Mèlderýn.

Certainly one might have no accents or ignore the accents we provide, and choose any of the six possibly ways to stress the syllables, but the need for standard pronunciation is not answered if I do nothing. I cannot serve the need for standard pronunciation *without* some accenting and this means I cannot properly serve the audience that wants standard pronunciation.

## USAGE

- ❖ Primary Stress is indicated by an acute accent (á);
- ❖ Secondary stress is indicated by a grave accent (à);
- ❖ A circumflex accent (â) indicates that the vowel should be pronounced as if it were followed by an "r": e.g., Hân would be pronounced Harn.
- ❖ If the vowel with the circumflex accent is actually followed by an 'r' (and sometimes even if it is not) the 'r' should be 'rolled'.
- ❖ In the absence of an acute, a circumflex may indicate primary stress: Elórin eh-LOR-rin)

- ❖ In the absence of a grave, the circumflex may indicate secondary stress: Góthmír GOTH-mir)
- ❖ If both acute and grave are present the circumflex indicates tertiary or no stress at all (as in Quôrónè Kworr-OH-nay)
- ❖ One syllable words do not require and are unlikely to have acute or grave accents (but may have circumflex accents).
- ❖ Y is a vowel. It can have primary stress, but cannot have secondary nor a circumflex.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ Upper Case letters have accents (but they may be omitted in long lists).
- ❖ Often, even in the case of a three plus syllable word, it is unnecessary to indicate secondary stress since it makes little or no difference to the pronunciation of the word.
- ❖ In the even that primary stress is on the first syllable, and there is no need for a secondary stress accent, the primary stress accent may be omitted (assumed). An unnecessary accent *may* be included for aesthetic reasons.
- ❖ If there is a primary stress accent, a secondary stress accent *may* be added to a terminal vowel to 'remind' people that terminal vowels are *always* pronounced.



Please remember this: accents are very small, and to *most* eyes they make words look more interesting and aesthetic. If you don't like them for some reason, they are surely small enough to ignore.

I have actually reduced the number of accents used through usage rules in order to cause less 'stress' to the small minority who seem to get very emotional when I try to help the majority (and myself<sup>3</sup>). I am the creator of these publications. They are, effectively, my life's work. I ask people to show a little respect, even if they feel the need to criticise *my* use of accents in *my* original work.

I have to say, though, that I am tired of what seems to be an endless discourse on the merits of accents and even of foreign language in my work. I am tired of many things, and not least because I have a rather debilitating illness. Please show a little compassion along with the respect. I frankly do not have time to keep remaking decisions like this.

Thank you for your consideration.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cs.brown.edu/fun/welsh/Glossary.html>

<sup>2</sup> This is due to the absence of grave or circumflex y's in any of my fonts... an arbitrary but unavoidable rule.

<sup>3</sup> The technical reasons for using accents on the foreign words are overwhelming. Without accents our publications would be full of spelling errors and typos.