

The Mithrimin dialect of Sindarin

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He [Beren] spoke Sindarin after a fashion (probably derived from North Sindarin); but his halting and dialectal use of it offended the ears of King Thingol.

PM:369

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Introduction

In remarks scattered through several sources after *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien mentions a variety of Sindarin, the North Sindarin or Mithrimin dialect. The aim of this article is to gather and analyze its various phonological details. An earlier article on this matter has been written by Richard Derdziński [1] (2001) and the present work will necessarily coincide with it in part, but there is much new material to be considered that has been published since.

1 Internal and external history

The Noldorin language was intended to be rich in various dialects from the very outset. The account in PE14:61-62 mentions the dialects of Mithrim, Gondolin, the Feanorian speech of Nargothrond and several other varieties. The *Lhammas* mentions the division of Noldorin into the speech Mithrim (Fingolfin's folk), Gondolin (Turgon's folk), Nargothrond (Felagund's folk) and the speech of Himring (the folk of Fëanor and his sons) (LR:177).

The Etymologies list two words from this last Feanorian dialect, namely **maið** 'pale, fallow, fawn' (Noldorin **meið**) (VT45:30), hence also the name **Maiðros** for **Meiðros**; and **nef** 'bolster, cushion' for N. **nedhw** (changed from 'scarred').

But in the conception after *The Lord of the Rings* the Noldor do not speak Noldorin, but Quenya, while the previous Noldorin language appears as Sindarin, spoken by the Sindar or Grey-Elves in Middle-earth. Sindarin is divided into three main dialects: Doriathrin or South Sindarin (spoken in Doriath), West Sindarin (spoken at the coast) and North Sindarin (spoken in Mithrim, Hithlum and Dor-lómin). Further subdivisions include the speech of Ossiriand, North-West and North-East Sindarin (PE17:131-134).

North Sindarin is also called 'the language of Mithrim' or simply 'Mithrim' (WJ:400,411). The adjectival formation 'Mithrimin' is mentioned in PE17:134. In the internal history it perished during the war against Melkor and left little or no records, but can be traced in personal and place names (**Dor-lómin**, **Hithlum**). Tolkien also mentions that *some of its words and forms eventually became incorporated in Sindarin of Sirion*. The classical Sindarin of the following ages, as it is for instance encountered in *The Lord of the Rings*, is mainly derived from West Sindarin, since the survivors of the war against Melkor took refuge at the coasts while the other parts of Beleriand were destroyed.

Interestingly, North Sindarin in fact became the language of the house of Fëanor, but now because the Noldor made first contact with the Sindar of Mithrim and adapted their speech. So earlier Feanorian **nef** agrees with the sound changes outlined for North Sindarin, but the preference of **ai** for **ei** does not, both diphthongs appear in the ultimate syllable of Sindarin words.

See also the detailed account in [1].

2 Mithrimin phonology

unlenited *m* (PE17:108,128,131,132,134, WJ:400, VT41:10)

The lack of lenition of **m** > **v** is a frequently mentioned feature of North Sindarin and is also mentioned as a *chief difference* from West Sindarin (PE17:128).

In later Sindarin phonology final **-m** becomes **-n** (cf. **talán**, **tâl** 'flat space, platform' < **talam**) where Noldorin had **-m** > **-f** (**talaf** 'ground, floor' < TALAM-). In North Sindarin final **-m** is retained.

Examples:

- **arāmē** 'Orome' > NS **Arum**, WS **arauv** > **araw** (WJ:400)
- Q. **Tyelkormo** 'hasty-raiser' adapted as NS **Celegorm**, WS would have been ***Celegorf** (VT41:10, PM:353)
- **lāmina** *'echoing' > NS **lōmin**, WS **lōmēn** > **loven** (PE17:133)
- **χ̄p̄ilōmē** > NS **hīthlūm** > **Hithlum**, WS **hithlūv** > **Hithlū** (ibid.)
- adapted Q. **martan**, **martam-** 'dwelling-house' > NS **bartham**, WS **barthan** (PE17:109)

In this notation **ū** indicates a nasalized vowel, its nasality is later lost in Sindarin. Similarly, **m̄** probably indicates a bilabial spirant with a nasalized preceding vowel.

Note that **Hithlum** is a pure Noldorin word in *The Etymologies* (LUM-, LR:370), with N. **lhum** 'shade' < ***lumbē** (Q. **lumbe**).

In a private exchange I was made aware of a possibility that this dialectal unlenited **m** could be a possible explanation for medial **-m-** in the name **Boromir**. PE17:134 states that *the Beor-folk of the Edain were influenced by the Finrodians[?], especially in personal names, during their residence in the highlands*. Both **Boromir** and **Belemir** are names from the house of Beor (WJ:230-231) and thus could be originally North Sindarin names, adapted in the south, and eventually by the Edain.

In *The Etymologies* **Boromir** is a pure Noldorin name, from Old Noldorin **Boromfiro** (BOR-). In a footnote in the Appendix F to LotR, Tolkien explains it as a mixed Sindarin-Quenya form.

unlenited initial *s-*, preserved medial *-h-* (PE17:134)

There is actually a whole series of formulations, one replacing another:

Initial s remained and medial h

Thus probably **sad** '[...] place, spot' (VT42:20) > WS ***i had**, NS ***i sad**. The sentence looks unfinished, but maybe intends to say that medial **h** also remains. This seems to refer to the contraction when **h** is found between vowels, e.g. the past tense of **sav-** 'have': **ahawv** > **aw** *'did not have' (SAM-, PE17:173) where in NS one would hence expect ***ahōm**, ***ahum**.

>> *S unlenited initially and medially*

This apparently implies NS ***i sad**, ***asōm**, ***asum**.

>> *S unlenited initially; kh > h initially and medially*

Now, **-s-** seems to be lenited again medially (NS ***i sad**, ***ahōm**, ***ahum**), but **kh > h** would imply a lack of mutation of **h**, e.g. CE **khēr** > WS **i-chír** (VT41:9), NS ***i-hír**.

>> *S unlenited initially; h (preserved) medially*

Now apparently medial **-kh-** > **-ch-** [χ] (mentioned further on the same page), hence **i-chír**; but probably medial lenition **-s-** > **-h-** without further change, i.e. ***ahōm**, ***ahum**.

The Beorian name **Barahir** contains unlenited medial **-h-** which could be explained by an adaptation from Northern Sindarin (the conception *kh > h initially and medially*), similar to **Boromir**, **Belemir** (see above).

pp, tt, kk > p, t, k

(but **ph, th, kh** and **ps, ts, ks > f, th [b], ch [χ]**, as in West Sindarin (PE17:134))

This is a remarkable development, as unvoiced intervocalic consonants are not found anywhere else in Tolkien's Celtic branch of invented languages (Goldogrin, Noldorin, Late Ilkorin, Sindarin). But there is a similar development in Welsh where **bb, dd, gg** become **pp, tt, cc**, e.g. **Cad-deyrn** > **Catéyrn** for **Catteyrn**, **wyneb-bryd** > **wynepryd** 'countenance' (J. Morris-Jones, An Elementary Welsh Grammar §127).

We can construct some examples:

- **ap-pata-** 'walk behind, on track or path' (WJ:387) > NS ***apad-** 'follow', ***Apadon** 'man, follower', WS **aphad-**, **Aphadon**
- **quettā** 'word' (LR:366) > NS ***pet** 'word', WS **peth**
- **rokkō** 'swift horse for riding' (Let:297) > NS ***roc** 'horse', ***rocon** 'rider', WS **roch**, **rochon** (UT:313)

unchanged combinations 'nasal + voiceless stop' mp, nt, nc (VT42:27, PE17:132,134), unchanged lt (PE17:132,133,134)

In a note to the essay *The Rivers and Beacon-hills of Gondor* (1969) Tolkien states that *the forms canthui [4th], enchui [6th], tolthui [8th] are those of the southern Sindarin dialect adopted by the Noldor. In the Northern dialect (which perished in the course of the war against Morgoth) nt, nc, mp had remained unchanged (VT42:27). In another note cantui, canhui 'fourth' encui, enchui 'sixth' (VT42:10) are cited where cantui, encui have apparently to be taken as NS cognates and examples of unchanged -nt-, -nc-. Another example is cantu >> centu with an unclear meaning (PE17:133).*

The combination **lt** also remains unchanged, although **lp, lc, rt, rp, rc** become spirantal **lph, lch, rth, rph, rch** (PE17:132). Hence we expect NS ***toltui** '8th', ***maltorn** < **malt** 'gold, **orn** 'tree' (VT42:27).

The conception at that time may be summarized as following:

Old Sindarin	North Sindarin	West Sindarin
mp	mp	early -mf- [bilabial f], late -mh- , final -mp
nt	nt	early -nþ- , late -nh- , final -nt
nc	nc	early -nχ- , late -nh- , final -nc
lt	lt	early -lþ- , late -lh- , final -lt

[Tolkien himself uses **nch, ñx** for **nχ** and **ñh** for **nh**.]

In this notation **-mh-**, **-nh-**, **-nh-** represent long or geminated voiceless nasals [m̥m̥], [n̥n̥], [ɲ̥ɲ̥] and **-lh-** a long or geminated voiceless l [l̥l̥].

There is also a different earlier conception: A note from 13 December 1962 describes the following development:

Old Sindarin	North Sindarin	West, South, Ossiriandic Sindarin
mp	medial -mf- , final mp	medial -mh- , -m- , final -mp
nt	medial -nth- , final -nt (late)	medial -nh- , -nn- , final -nt
nc	medial -nch- > -ch- (late), final -nc	medial -nh- , -ng- , final -nc
lt	medial -lth- , final -lt	medial -lh- , -ll- , final -lt

[Tolkien uses **ngh** for **ñh**.]

In this notation **ˉch-** means that the preceding vowel receives compensatory lengthening when the velar nasal **ŋ** is lost (however cf. NS **dancen**, **dachen** (PE17:133) without lengthening). The medial voiceless spirants now become voiced **-m-**, **-nn-**, **-ng-**, **-ll-** *unless followed still by a stressed syllable*. Interestingly the same pattern is found in Welsh, e.g. ***brénhin** > **brénin** 'king', pl. **brenhíñaeth** (J. Morris-Jones, *An Elementary Welsh Grammar* §88, 90,126).

In this conception **mp**, **nt**, **nc**, **lt** are not preserved in North Sindarin, but universally become spirantal at some stage of Old Sindarin. But North Sindarin among all dialects retains the spirants and thus still remains more archaic. The combinations **lf** < **lt**, **rth** < **rt**, **rf** < **rp**; **rch** < **rc** remain spirantal in both dialects.

long \bar{a} > \bar{q} (WJ:414, PE17:133,134)

The long vowel \bar{a} universally becomes \bar{q} in Sindarin. The hook indicates an open pronunciation of the vowel, hence IPA [ɔ:] (as in English *law*, but short). North Sindarin retains this sound, but in West Sindarin it breaks into the diphthong **au**, in some positions it just shortens to **o** (WJ:414). In unstressed position \bar{q} seems to become **u** in North Sindarin. Another explanation would be that this is due to the following labial **m**, hence $\bar{q}m$ > **um**, with a different development if followed by other consonants.

As examples we have:

- **nābā** 'hollow' > NS **nōv**, **nōf**, WS **nauv** > **naw**, **nov-** (WJ:414)
- **arāmē** 'Orome' > **arōmæ** > NS **Arum**, WS **araum(a)** > **arauñ**, **arauv** > **Araw** (WJ:400)
- **lāmina** *'echoing' > NS **lōmin** > **lomin**, WS **lōmēn** > **loven** (PE17:133)

The shift **lōmin** > **lomin** might indicate the adaptation of this word into classical Sindarin in the place name **Dorlomin** or **Dor-lōmin** (Silin), genuine North Sindarin would still be **lōmin**.

[Note that WJ:400 mentions that in North Sindarin *diphthongization of \bar{o} [...] did not occur*, but this is probably a misreading for \bar{q} – only that would make sense in the particular context of the passage (namely the development of **arōmæ**) and in the context of Sindarin phonology in general, where \bar{o} becomes \bar{u} instead.]

probably **au** > **ô** (PE17:133)

A couple of variants of the name of 'The Mound of Slain', appearing as **Haudh-en-Ndengin** in *The Silmarillion* are found in PE17:133 (cf. also WJ:79, LR:363). Among these forms, one has apparently to identify **Hauð i nenghin** as West Sindarin exhibiting the long voiceless velar nasal **ngh** < **nk**. The form **Hôð indencin** then has apparently to be identified as North Sindarin since it shows preserved **-nc-**. The variant **Hôð i ndechina** with inflected genitive **-a** might be Doriathrin (interestingly it is a genitive singular suffix, maybe because plurality is expressed by vowel mutation, cf. **-(i)on**, PE17:97). At least by the time of *The Etymologies* the inflected genitive is a Doriathrin feature, e.g. **Nauglamîr**, N. **mîr na Nauglin**, **Nauglvir** > **Nauglavir** (LR:375). Alternatively, **Hôð i ndechina** might be a parallel North Sindarin form – note that NS **dancen**, **dachen** 'slain' is mentioned in the line above.

If Tolkien did not change the derivation of **hauð** 'mound, grave, tomb', it should still be derived from **khagda** (LR:363, KHAG-) with vocalized **g**; or from **khabdā** (PE18:91, √KHAB-) with vocalized **b**, in any case via the diphthong **au**. So it seems that North Sindarin changes **au** (from **a** + consonant or from original **aw**) to **ô** (in all probability identical to \bar{q}), but might still develop **au**, for example from **ou**.

absence of a-mutation (PE17:133,134)

A-mutation in Sindarin is caused by final **-a** and influences **i** > **e**, **u** > **o** in the preceding syllable. Tolkien states that *u and o and i/e remained distinct – no a-mutation of i* in North Sindarin (PE17:134).

We have only an example of **i**, but can construct examples for **u**:

- **lāmina** *'echoing' > NS **lōmin**, WS **loven**
- **kuldā** 'hollow' > NS ***cull**, WS **coll** (WJ:414)

However, this rule seems to be taken back again with the following development:

- **dankīnā** 'slain' > NS **dancen**, **dachen**, WS **danyxen** > **danghen** > **dangen**

where one might have expected NS ***dancin** or ***dencin**.

combinations with final *-w* (VT42:8-9)

Old Sindarin	NS	WS
-tw > -dw	-b	-du
-dw > -ðw	-v	-ðu
-thw > -þw	-f [f]	-þu
-nw	-m	-nu

Tolkien says that Q. **Finwe** would have been adapted as S. **Fim**, but was actually sindarized as **-fin**, **Curufin** (VT41:10). PM:344 confirms that **Fim** would have been North Sindarin, and otherwise **Finu**.

In *The Etymologies* the sound change **-ðw** > **-v** was already attributed to the Feanorian dialect, e.g. **nidwō** 'bolster, cushion' > ON **nidwa** > N. **nedhw**, Feanorian **nef** (NID-, LR:378, VT46:4); also deleted ON **nidwa** 'scarred' > N. **neðw**, Feanorian **nef**. Here, **-f** is probably just a spelling of [v]. To avoid confusion one might use **-ph** for [f] and **-v** for [v].

There are not many examples with the above combinations to be found in Noldorin and Sindarin:

- **matwā** 'hungry' > NS ***mab**, S. **maud**, **madu** (PE17:148)
- **catwā** 'shaped, formed' > NS ***cab**, S. **cadu** (KAT-, LR:362-363) [N. **cadw**]
- **khithwa** 'foggy, obscure, vague' > NS ***hiph**, S. **hethu** (KHIS-, KHITH-, LR:364) [N. **hethw**]
- ***ǵanw-** > NS. ***am**, S. **anu** 'a male (or Men or Elves), male animal' (ǵAN-, LR:360) [N. **anw**]
- **wanwē** 'death, act of dying' > NS ***gwam**, S. **gwanu** (WAN-, LR:397) [N. **gwanw**]

Note that for instance **pathmā** becomes Old Noldorin **pathwa** > **pathw** 'level, space, sward' (PATH-, LR:380), but if this is to be taken into later Sindarin, the change **m** > ***v** > **w** would not be universal and the Mithrimin form would be ***pathm** (later maybe also twosyllabic ***?pathum**). The same applies to **khithme** > N. **hithw** 'fog' (NS ***hithm**, ***?hithum**).

retraction of accent (?), retention of *-nd-* after accent (?) (PE17:133)

In what appears to be somewhat rough notes, Tolkien mentions an *accent retraction in N[orth]* (PE17:133). The following examples are **Góndolind**, S. **Gonnólen**, **Gondólen**, **Gondolen**. This seems to be an attempt to explain the name **Gondolin** as a Northern Sindarin word: Apparently North Sindarin keeps the accent on the first syllable (**gónd(o)lind** > **Góndolind**) and **nd** which follows this accented syllable is not changed. But the development outside Mithrim would be ***gónd dólen** > ***Gon(d)-ðólen** > **Gonnólen** with medial **-nn-**. Somewhat unclear about this note is the different composition – **Góndolind** is obviously ***'stone of music'** (as explained on the same page below), but **Gonnólen** must be ***'hidden rock'** with **dólen** 'hidden' (cf. DUL-, LR:355). One would have expected a comparison of different developments of the same primitive form.

3 Ideas taken from earlier languages

Edward Kloczko has long ago made the observation that the North Sindarin dialect seems to incorporate some aspects of the Ilkorin of *The Etymologies* for which there was no place in the legendarium anymore after Tolkien had decided that the Grey-Elves should speak Sindarin instead [2]. For instance, Ilkorin changes **ā** > **ō** instead of a diphthongization to **au** as in Noldorin and leaves **m** unmutated. The same is, however, also the case in Doriathrin [3]:

- **tāro** > Ilk. **tōr** 'king', N. **†taur** (TA3-, LR:389)
- ***lāma** > Dor. **lóm** 'echo', **lómen** 'echoing' (LAM-, LR:367)

At this stage **Dorlómen**, **Ered Lómin** is in fact a noldorized Doriathrin name **Lómendor**, **Lóminorthin**, while later **Dor-lómin** is an adapted North Sindarin name.

In Noldorin **tinmē** 'sprinkle, glint' becomes **tinw**, but **tim** in Ilkorin (TIN-, LR:393). In later Sindarin TIN- yields **tim** 'star, spark' (PE17:22). Kloczko suggested that this could be a loan from North Sindarin, but in fact it might be that Tolkien simply changed the phonological conception where now **tinmē** > S. **tim** regularly (essentially by nasal mutation, cf. **Annúminas** 'Tower of the West' (UT:419), evidently < **annûn** + **minas**). In any case, the correspondence of WS **-nu** to NS **-m** is separately attested in VT42:8-9.

But it seems that Tolkien also introduced many features from even earlier stages into North Sindarin, specifically from Goldogrin. Goldogrin leaves both **m** and **s** unmutated (GL:7), although they rarely appear intervocally. Primitive **ā** also becomes **ō** in Goldogrin; and final **-nw** > **-m**. For example:

- **ausin** 'rich' (GL:20)
- **amabwed** 'having hand' (GL:19)

- ***āra** > **ōr** 'dry sand' (GL:62), Q. **āra**
- **enwa** > **em** '(aj.) named, called by name' (GL:32), cf. **enu-**, **enwa-** 'am called, am named', **enweg** 'namesake'

There is also a hesitation in the Gnomish Lexicon between combinations like **mf**, **nth**, **ngh**; **lf**, **lth**, **lch**; **rf**, **rth**, **rch** and **mp**, **nt**, **nc**; **lp**, **lt**, **lc**; **rp**, **rt**, **rc**. It seems that Tolkien sometimes decided for one or the other pattern; and sometimes for both. For example:

- **tļp-** > **talpa-** 'prop up, buttress up', **talpon** 'a slender pillar' (GL:69)
- **dolfa** 'a mole' (GL:30), cf. Q. **nołpa**
- **anthin**, pl. of **ant** 'cheek' (GL:19), cf. Q. **anta**
- **lunta** 'a ship' (GL:55)
- **tent** 'toe', pl. **tenthin**, **tentin** (GL:70)

See [4] for more details.

The change **-nw** > **-m** also appears in Early Noldorin: **hen(n)** 'eye', pl. **hinn**, but dual **him** < ***henwi** (PE13:122). Early Noldorin also seems to have a preference for **u** before **m**, it always appears as the connecting vowel in the 1st person pl. present excl., e.g. **glathrum** *'we polish', **madum** *'we eat', **dagum** *'we slay' (PE13:126-130) – compare NS **Arum**.

References

- [1] Richard Derdziński. *Northern dialect of Sindarin* <http://www.elvish.org/gwaith/pdf/nsindarin.pdf>
- [2] Helge Fauskanger. *Ilkorin – a "lost tongue"?* <http://www.uib.no/People/hnohf/ilkorin.htm>
- [3] Helge Fauskanger. *Doriathrin - the mothertongue of Lúthien* <http://folk.uib.no/hnohf/doriath.htm>
- [4] Roman Rausch. *Historical Phonology of Goldogrin* http://sindanoorie.net/art/Gold_phon.html

update: Jun 29 2010 — discussion of **Boromir**, **Belemir**, **Barahir** added