Write French with tengwar

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Inspired from J.R.R.Tolkien's work and Simon Rousseau's mode

In Tolkien's world live many species, races and peoples, speaking numerous languages, and some of these have been invented and described by the author. To write these languages down, their speakers had to invent some writing systems, and Tengwar is one of them. Si this writing system has been invented by the elf Fëanor to transcribe Quenya language, it has also been used to transcribe other elven languages, Black Speach of Mordor or human languages. Since these languages use different sounds, Tengwar writing must be adapted in order to satisfy the language peculiarities: as Latin letters make different sounds in French, English or Turkish, tengwar are pronounced differently from one language to another, we call these pronunciations, "modes".

Hence, there are many tengwar modes: Quenya mode, Sindarin mode, Bereliand's mode, but also two English modes (invented by Tolkien itself), and a lot of fan-made mods for their natives languages. This document propose a phonetic mode for France's French, it's designed to cover most of European dialects and accents and might need adaptations to transcribe non-European dialects.

If each mode has its specificities, they also have a lot in common, and this mode tries to stay as close as possible to "standard" tengwar's pronunciations.

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General presentation

Tengwar "alphabet" works as an impure abjad: consonants are written with tengwar (kind of letters), and vowels by thetar (kind of accent) dropped on the preceding consonant tengwa.

For example, to write the word "la", we need the consonant "l", written as ⟨image⟩ and the vowel "a", written as ⟨image⟩, combined as ⟨image⟩ . If a vowel doesn't have any preceding consonant, then we use a "carrier", written as ⟨image⟩ or ⟨image⟩ . For example, the word "a" is written ⟨image⟩ .

    This mode is phonetic, meaning we don't have to transcribe "letter by letter", but rather to transcribe each sound as it is pronounced.

Tengwar list

	I (Tincotéma)		II (Parmatéma)		III (Calmatéma)		IV (Quessetéma)	
1	ᴘ	t	ᴘ	p	ᴄ|	k		
	tinco	**t**ar**t**e	parma	**p**a**p**a	calma	**c**o**qu**ille		
2	ᴘᴏ	d	ᴘᴏ	b	ᴄᴄ|	g		
	ando	**d**in**d**e	umbar	**b**ar**b**e	anga	**g**a**g**e		
3	�	s	ᴘ	f	ᴅ	ʃ		
	súle	**s**au**ciss**e	formen	**ph**oto	harma	**ch**anger		
4	ᴘᴏ	z	ᴘᴏ	v	ᴄᴄᴅ	ʒ		
	anto	ha**s**ard	ampa	**v**i**v**re	anca	**j**u**g**e		
5	ᴍ	n	ᴍ	m	ᴄᴄ	ɲ	ᴛᴛ	ŋ
	númen	**n**ain	mata	**m**a**m**an	ngoldo	a**gn**eau	ngwame	parki**ng**
Additional tengwar	ᴦ	ʁ	ᴛ	l	ᴕ	Short carrier	ᴕ	Long carrier
	rómen	**r**a**r**e	lambe	**l**entille	telco		ára	
	ᴧ	s [1]	ᴓ	s [1]	ᴧ	z [1]	ᴣ	z [1]
	silme	**s**au**ciss**e	silme nuquerna	**s**au**ciss**e	esse	ha**s**ard	esse nuquerna	ha**s**ard
	λ	h [2]	ᴄ	ɥ [3]	λ	j [3]	ᴏ	w [3]
	hyarmen	**h**op !	osse	h**u**itre	yanta	**y**aourt	úre	**ou**i

shape	phoneme
name	example

[1] See "Writing variations" section
[2] Not "mute h", but "English style h"
[3] They are semivowels, treated as consonants here

Thetar

shape	phoneme	example
ö	a	p**a**tte
ö	ɑ	p**â**te
ȯ	i	m**y**the
ọ	ə ("caduc e")	p**e**tit
ó	e	l**es**
ő	ɛ	l**ai**t
ò	ø	j**eû**ne
ò	œ	j**eu**ne
ó	o	c**ô**te
ớ	ɔ	c**o**tte
ȝ	u	b**ou**che
ŏ	y	n**u**l

Examples and specificities

arbre : ïɣpɔɣ

nourriture : rɔ̈ɣp̌ɣ

aorte : ïïɣp

boa : pɔ̈j

bois : pɔò

elfique : ïȝƀq

Allophones

Since this mode cover different french dialects and accents, some tengwar and thetar might transcribe phonemes that sound undifferentiated to some speakers. This way, "patte" and "pâte" are pronounced identically by many French speakers. This is concerns the following phonemes: [a / ɑ], [e / ɛ], [ø / œ], [o / ɔ], [ɲ / nj], [ŋ / ŋg], [ɥ / w]. Speakers who do not differentiate these sounds can pick the symbol they want, even if we tend to prefer the following: ̊, ́, ̀, ̓, ꞔꞔ, ꞔꞔ, ꞔ respectively.

Caduc e

 ̤ theta represents the "caduc e", which is the "e" that can be either pronounced or not. As an example, "petit" can be pronounced "p'tit", and "je mache" pronounced "j'mache":

petit : ꝑꝑ̇   je mache : ꞔd ꝏ̇d

Depending on their accent, some speakers may tend to write them more or less frequently.

Long vowels

Some French dialects distinguish short and long vowels. They will then note long vowels putting the theta on a long carrier, even if this vowel is following a consonant. For example, in some northern France and Belgium dialects, we will distinguish:

mettre : ꝏ̋ꝑɣ   maître : ꝏ̋jꝑɣ

Nasal vowels

French has up to 4 nasal vowels: ã ("an" / "en"), ɔ̃ ("on"), ɛ̃ ("in") et œ̃ ("un"). We transcribe them using ̄ theta: respectively ̊̄, ̓̄, ̇̄ et ̈̄. For example:

banc : ꝑ̊̄   blond : ꝏꝔ̃   brin : ꝑy̓̃   brun : ꝑy̆̃

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Note that "in" and "un" sounds are undistinguished to numerous speakers, which can use the transcription they want, we will prefer $\overset{\cdot\cdot}{\bigcirc}$.

Liaisons

Liaisons are written by putting the tengwa between two middle dots:

- Un grand monsieur : ĭ ccρ̊ỹ m̃hλ

- Un grand avion : ĭ ccρ̊ỹ·p·ïlɔ𝔁̊

- De grands avions : pɔ ccρ̊ỹ·lɔ·ïlɔ𝔁̊

Here again, different speakers may use more or less liaisons, it is free to the writer to write a liaison down or not, in order to match their own pronunciation.

Gemination

"Gemination" is when the pronunciation of a consonant is doubled, making it a "long consonant". Gemination is not very present in French, but it can be found in some specific words, and as an emphasis pronunciation: for example, the word "terrifiant" is pronounced "té-ri-fian" even if it has 2 "r". But to put some emphasis on the word, one may double the pronunciation of the "r", making it "tér-ri-fian".

If the author wants to write this pronunciation down, they may simply write the tengwa twice, or put a $\bigcirc$ theta under the tengwa to double it, such as the following examples:

	not geminated	double tengwar	theta
te**rr**ifiant	ρ̇ẏb𝔁̊	ρ̇ẏẏb𝔁̊	ρ̇ỵ̇b𝔁̊
i**mm**édiatement	im̃ρɔλ̇pm̃̊	imm̃ρɔλ̇pm̃̊	iṃ̃ρɔλ̇pm̃̊
i**ll**ogique	iȼ̇ɔ̈lq	iȼȼ̇ɔ̈lq	iȼ̣̇ɔ̈lq

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Writing variations

This section propose purely cosmetic writing variations, to permit every author to use their own style.

S : thúle / silme / silme nuquerna / sa-rince

You surely noticed that the tengwar table is containing 3 tengwar to transcribe the "s" sound.

The b and $\smallint$ tengwar actually have the same usage and can be swapped as will. Since $\smallint$'s shape isn't very practical when it comes to adding an upper theta, it is possible to "reverse" it as a $\mathcal{g}$ to make it easier. Hence, the word "saucisse" can be either written $bbbb$ ou $\mathcal{ggg}$, or even mix up different styles within a single word.

Z : anto / áre / áre nuquerna

Same way as "s", "z" sound can be transcribed as b, ξ or $\mathcal{z}$ depending on the writer's preferences and theta placing difficulties.

Y : yanta / double-amatixe

When there is a tengwa without any theta on it, followed by a λ, it is possible to replace the λ by a theta placed under the preceding tengwa. For example:

- pied : $p\acute{\lambda}$ / $\acute{p}$

- attention : $\mathring{j}\mathring{p}b\acute{\lambda}$ / $\mathring{j}\mathring{p}\check{b}$

- liaison : $c\acute{\lambda}\check{z}$ / $\acute{c}\check{z}$

Carriers

There are two "carriers" which purpose is to carry a theta which doesn't have a tengwa to hold it, they are called the short carrier **ᴊ** and the long carrier **ᴊ** . These two symbols can be used one in place of the other to satisfy writer's aesthetics tastes, except if they are trying to represent Long vowels. The carrier nevertheless tends to be the mostly used one by default.

Numbers

Even it is possible to write numbers directly by transcribing their pronunciation with tengwar, they can also be written using a numerical system. If JRRT hasn't himself described a precised numerical system, his son Christopher published one, which has been adapted by fans to their modes. One can find multiple numerical notation standards on the internet, and I am here proposing my own way to write numbers, not inspired from Christopher Tolkien's notes.

Unlike Arab numbers notations, which uses a base-10 system, this one uses a base-12. This means that where we are used to manipulate ten symbols (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9) having values ranging from zero to nine, this mode uses twelve symbols having values ranging from zero to eleven. The symbols being the following:

Arabs	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Tengwar	ᴅ	ᴅ̇	ᴅ̈	ᴅ̈̇	ƕ	ƕ̇	ƕ̈	ƕ̈̇	þ	þ̇	þ̈	þ̈̇

Examples

Since this numerical system is in base-12, one needs to convert numbers from one base to another before transliterating them to tengwar. If you are not comfortable with mathematics, I would advise you to use a software converter[1], either to understand the following examples, or to make your own transliterations.

12 : ᴅ̇ᴅ   13 : ᴅ̇ᴅ̇   15 : ᴅ̈̇ᴅ̇   21 : ᴅ̇þ̇   107 : þþ̈̇

144 : ᴅ̇ᴅᴅ   377 : ᴅ̈ƕ̇ƕ   1728 : ᴅ̇·ᴅᴅᴅ

100 000 : ƕþ̇·þ̇ƕƕ   10 000 000 : ᴅ̈̇·ƕᴅ̈ᴅ̈̇·ᴅƕƕ

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1   Some can easily be found online, here for example.

-1 : ～ὐ -21 : ～ὐϸ 1,5 : ὐ:ϭ 3,25 : ὐ:ὐ

Punctuation

Tokien never wrote a precise tengwar punctuation system either, if some standards can be found from one mode to another, I am here proposing to you my own non-standard way to punctuate:

Paragraph start	⁙	Parentheses	⟦ícɋᶚpᴄ⟧
Comma	:	Simple quotes[2]	～·ícɋᶚpᴄ·～
Period	::	Double quotes[2]	≈:ícɋᶚpᴄ:≈
Paragraph ending period	:～	Semicolon	⋮
Exclamation comma	⸮	Colon	∴
Exclamation mark	⸮⸮	Ellipsis	∵
Paragraph ending exclamation mark	⸮～	Apostrophe[3]	·
Interrogation comma	?	Foreign language word[4]	ícɋᶚᴍpᴄ·
Interrogation mark	?:	Hyphen	～
Paragraph ending interrogation mark	?～		

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2 Can also be used to emphasis a title or subtitle.
3 Unlike the other signs that take a space before and after them, the apostrophe is in direct contact to the words it is linking.
4 Foreign words can either be written with approximate phonetic using this French mode, or by borrowing the way they are written in their own language mode (such as the word ·pᴄγ· in this document's title).

Examples

We are now reaching this document's end, I hope you enjoyed it, and that it will help you write beautiful texts. To finish, here are two example texts written with this mode.

Universal declaration of human rights

~· ĩyp̀cqᴄ p̀ỳm̀ ·~

∴ p̀ ᴄ·ʒ·ĩĵpy ĩ⊞ m̃6 ᴄpꝏy·ξ·í íᴄɋ ᵀ̂ p̀cᴄ̃ꝏ í ᵀ̂ pꝏyᴏ̀ :: íᴄ q̃ꝏ p̀ó pꝏ ȳ̃ᶘ í p̀ᴏ ᶘ̃ᶘ̃6 í p̀ᴏ̈⋔·p·̇íᴄᴄly ᴄ·ξ·ᴛ̃ ĩᴍ̃̃y ᴄ·ξ·ĵpy p̃̃·ξ·ᴛ̃·ꝏ·̃ᴌ6p̀ỳ pꝏ 6ȳ̃p̀ỳꝏp̀ :~

Ring poem

≈: pỳᴏ̀·ξ·ĵ ỳᴏ̀ p̀·ʒ·ĩ̃ᴄ⋔ m̃ỳ̃ᶘ ᶘ̂ ᴄ·ʒ·ĵp̀ᴏ̀ᴄ :

ᶘ̃ꝏ ĵ ᶘ̃ᴄ̀ꝏy pꝏ m̃ p̃̃ ᴄ̀y ỳᴄ̀ᴌξ ᶘ̂ᴄ :

m̀6 ĵ·ʒ·ĩ̃ꝏ m̃ỳp̃̃ᴄ ĵ pỳp̃̃ ᶘ̃p̃̃m̃ :

ᵀ̂ p̀y ᴄ ᶘ̃ᴄ̀ꝏy m̀ỳ pꝏ m̀ỳỳ̀y ᴄ̃p̀ỳm̃

ĵ p̃̃j pꝏ m̃ỳp̃̃y ĩ 6·ĵp̃̃ꝏ ᴄ·ξ·ĵpꝏy ::

ᴛ̃·ꝏ·ĩ̃m̀ ĩm̀ᴄɋ p̀y ᴄ ᴄ̃ᴌ⋔̃ỳm̃ p̀6 :

ᴛ̃·ꝏ·ĩ̃m̀ ĩm̀ᴄɋ p̀y ᴄ ᵀ̂ᴄ̃lm̀ p̀6

ĵ p̃̃j pꝏ m̃ỳp̃̃y ĩ 6·ĵp̃̃ꝏ ᴄ·ξ·ĵpꝏy ::≈

Left-handed "mirror" writing

This whole document is presenting tengwar as Fëanor the elf did: written from left to right. However, the writing direction should theoretically depend on the hand used by the author: this document is written in the "right-handed direction", left-handed writers should write from right to left, reversing the text as if it was facing a mirror:

<div align="center">

⸰ ⸰ ⸰

</div>

Nevertheless, due to the facts that French is traditionally written from left to right, that readers lack training in left-handed style reading, and that, more recently: usage of right-handed keyboards and writing fonts; made that everybody tends to practice a left-to-right writing only.

Links and thanks

This mode is directly inspired from Simon Rousseau's one, which I tried to rationalize. Thanks to him for introducing tengwar to me.

Thanks a lot to various r/Tengwar users for their returns, critics and resources.

Thanks to Chiara Cadrich, from which my ring poem translation was inspired.

The font used in this document: Tengwar Telcontar.

And, of course, thanks to John and Christopher Tolkien for their works and writings. Do not hesitate to check the appendix E of the Lord Of The Ring, main resource published by JRRT about tengwar.