

A Foreigner's Guide to Valrathian

Everything you need to know about Valrathian language and society

Author's Note

Fantasy literature has a long history of building fully-imagined worlds to serve as settings for its stories. This is seen most prominently in J.R.R. Tolkien's legendarium, but is seen in most fantasy stories to some extent. While fantasy worlds and cultures are often extremely multi-faceted and can be fleshed out in a variety of ways, one common approach to making a culture feel real and lived-in is through the use of fictional languages.

The most popular use of fictional languages is the Elvish family of languages (in particular, the languages Quenya and Sindarin) seen in *The Lord of the Rings*. J.R.R. Tolkien, being a linguist by profession, created complete languages with a full vocabulary, a writing system, and several fictional texts. This instills a sense of cohesion in the Elvish culture seen in his stories. For instance, all Elves seen in *The Lord of the Rings* are given names from a consistent sound inventory, and each name has a meaning in an Elvish language. For instance, "Elrond" means "Star-Dome" in the language Sindarin, while "Galadriel" is the Sindarin-ized version of a Quenya name meaning "maiden crowned with a garland of bright radiance" (a name given to her by her husband). As a result, the names in *The Lord of the Rings* follow consistent naming conventions and are evocative of Elven culture. *The Lord of the Rings* furthers this sense of cohesion through its use of Elven languages for prose and poetry within the text, including an original poem (*A Elbereth Gilthoniel*) written originally in Sindarin.

Invented languages can further add to the worlding seen in fantasy cultures with the use of a writing system. Tolkien developed several writing systems – most notably Tengwar, an Elvish script, and a system of runes used by the dwarves in Middle Earth. Again, the writing systems here contributed to readers' imagined notions of the cultures of Middle Earth. Tengwar is a soft, flowing script that was developed by the Elves for writing on wooden surfaces, while the runes are sharpened, pointed, and were developed to be carved into stone. The writing systems thus line up with the readers' expectations for elves (as a forest-dwelling race) and dwarves (as a people who live in caves underground). The writing systems also align with expectations on perceived beauty of the races – Elves are described as being beautiful, and their script similarly lines as being aesthetically pleasing; similarly, the dwarvish runes are rugged and do not deliver the same sense of aesthetics as Tengwar does.

Beyond serving at a visually aesthetic or phonetic level, the construction of a language itself can yield interesting insights into a culture. The Klingon language, seen in many *Star Trek* shows, is one such instance. The Klingons are a violent warrior race with little emphasis on values other than that of being honorable, and this is reflected in their language. While Klingon has a word for "hate", it has no word for "love". Rather, while *qamuS* means "I hate you" in Klingon, to say "I love you", one must use the *-'Ha* suffix, which represents negation (similar to the *un-* prefix in English), so that *qamuS'Ha* means "I love you".

The principle that a language can influence the worldview of its speakers is known as the weak Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. It explains such effects in fictional languages as the Klingons not having a word for "love", and is a common principle in language invention. This is seen in invented languages outside of fantasy as well, such as Newspeak from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In the book, Orwell reasons about how the use of language allows Big Brother to restrict the thoughts of the people, and develops a (partial) language with the intention of representing a culture heavily oppressed and restricted in their way of thought.

This project, therefore, is an exercise in worlding. It takes a previously built up fantasy

culture, and develops a language for it. This involves inventing previously unexplored lore for a culture, including considerations such that the vocal anatomy of a species, the material on which writing usually takes place, the purpose for which writing developed (for accounting purposes, to document mythology, for long distance communication, and so on); but it also involves developing the language itself. This will allow me to demonstrate how the language of a species and its cultures are two sides of the same coin, and the language is merely a reflection of its culture.

A linguistic aspect to a fantasy setting's worldbuilding can add great depth to the setting. Even in cases where it is partially done, it can provide a sense of realism (as when characters in *The Tombs of Atuan* spoke different languages to highlight the differences in their worldbuilding) or match the unrealistic and fantastic setting (as in the poem *Jabberwocky* in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*). My language hopes to accomplish both of these goals to some extent, taking a fantasy race and providing it a backstory that will make it feel more real with a consistent culture, while also making it feel distinctly alien and distant from humanity and its cultures.

Contents

1	The Valrath	8
1.1	Valrathian Physiology	8
1.2	<i>Lrath zhafal</i>	8
1.3	The Valrathian Language	9
1.4	Valrathian Caste Systems	9
2	Sounds and Syllables in Standard Valrathian	10
2.1	Sounds and Pronunciations	10
2.1.1	Voicing	11
2.1.2	Non-Contrastive Sounds	11
2.2	Syllables	11
2.3	Stress	12
3	Parts of Speech	12
3.1	Nouns	12
3.1.1	Grammatical Numbers	12
3.1.2	Articles	12
3.1.3	Possessives	13
3.2	Pronouns	13
3.2.1	Personal Pronouns	13
3.2.2	Possessive Pronouns	14
3.2.3	Other Pronouns	14
3.3	Verbs	14
3.3.1	Infinitives	14
3.3.2	Past/Present Tense	15
3.3.3	Future Tense	16
3.3.4	Negating Verbs	16
3.4	Adjectives	16
3.5	Conjunctions	16
3.5.1	Independent Clause Conjunctions	16
3.6	Prepositions	17
3.6.1	Prepositions on Verbs	17

3.6.2	Prepositions on Nouns	17
4	Sentence Structure	18
4.1	Sentences as Objects	18
4.2	Imperative	18
5	Writing System	18
6	Appendix: Minister Thivgag	20
7	Appendix: Dictionary	25

Though a Valrath's demon-like qualities – reddish skin, pointed ears and nose, claws, horns and a long, spade-tipped tail – make it feared by many, Valraths are actually, for the most part, well-mannered and gentle, preferring to solve problems through diplomacy rather than violence.

Valraths pride themselves on being able to integrate themselves peacefully into human society, often becoming wealthy merchants or influential politicians. They prefer to live lavish lifestyles and wear extravagant clothing, as it helps to impress those they do dealings with.

Valraths, however, do not shy away from baser violent instincts when backed into a corner. They come from a dark and bloody heritage of genocide and warfare, and, as they have become more civilized, have simply made concerted efforts to put their past behind them. These efforts are in everyone's best interest, as the last thing anyone wants to see is a Valrath in the midst of a blood rage.

Writing Conventions

Throughout this document, Valrathian names are anglicized using the Latin alphabet. Details on this can be seen in [the section on sounds](#). Certain conventions are followed throughout the document:

- When proper nouns from Valrathian appear in English prose, they are anglicized for the convenience of the reader. Proper nouns are not capitalized, and Valrathian words are only capitalized when at the beginning of English sentences. In particular, there is no distinction between upper case and lower case letters in anglicized words.
- When specifically describing the Valrathian language, sometimes example words or phrases from Valrathian are included inline in a sentence. (For instance, "the word for weapon is *vethee*".) In cases like this, the Valrathian word is anglicized as before, and also italicized. Sometimes (though not in English prose) the syllables within a word are separated using periods (for instance, *vet.h.ee* instead of just *vethee*).
- When example phrases or sentences are included as a standalone, they are provided with a *gloss* and a literal translation. A gloss provides a literal translation of each word (or often, each morpheme in the word with an individual meaning) directly below the word, and then a "meaningful" complete translation of the phrase/sentence before that.

(1) *zhan pu-vethee*
many DEF-weapon
The many weapons

Here, *zhan* is a word representing "many", *pu-* is a prefix representing the definite article ("the").

- The words Valrath and Valrathian are often used as proper nouns in English to refer to the species or the language respectively. In these cases, they are capitalized as all proper nouns in English.

The Valrath

Note: All proper names in this section are pronounced as described in [the section on sounds](#). As is convention in Anglicized Valrathian, proper nouns are not capitalized except at the beginning of a sentence.

Valrathian Physiology

The Valrath were once thought to be literal devils. This, of course, is not true. However, Valraths *do* bear an uncanny resemblance to the devil, and this is a connotation that follows them through all their interactions with humans. In addition to their red skin and spade-tipped tail, they also wield immense strength and have incredible stamina. In fact, of all the races to visit the city of Gloomhaven, the Valrath are the most physically able.

This is an evolutionary benefit obtained through millennia spent as a war race. For the first thirty or so years of a Valrath's life (a time akin to a human's "childhood"), Valraths experience an incredible and hard-to-resist urge to *attack* other Valraths. While child Valraths are not nearly strong enough for this to be actively harmful, a Valrath may retain these tendencies into adulthood without a great deal of discipline in their early life.

In fact, it was this very tendency that likely led Valraths to wage *lrath zhafal*, a war that has continued since pre-historic times.

Lrath zhafal

Lrath zhafal (literally: "The Everlasting War"; usually translated as "War Eternal") is the war that has served as a backdrop to *all* of Valrath history, with the exception of the last hundred years. The war began several millennia ago, and it is unknown when or why the war started (there are several legends, but they tell conflicting stories). The war featured four major belligerents, known as "The Great Empires" (the lrath, bashku, mauai and aushig). Several minor states also allied themselves with major powers.

Of these, the lrath are the most ruthless and militant of the Great Empires, the lrath have dominated much of the last millennium of lrath zhafal. The name of their empire has since been adopted in modern Valrathian as the word for *war* (as can be seen in the phrase *lrath zhafal*).

In recent times, the lrath went on an especially rampant offensive that succeeded in virtually eradicating the bashku and aushig. Although genocide itself was common (in fact, many minor states had their populations decimated at some point in the war), this offensive was of horrifying proportions, and one in three Valraths was killed in the final thirty years of the war.

However, the offensive left the lrath army spread thin, and the mauai succeeded in capturing the lrath capital. At this time, inspired by the minister thivgag (who was a devout pacifist) of the mauai, the war was ended, and territories reshaped.

In the last century, Valrath have lived peaceful lives. Thivgag was merely the manifestation of a pacifist movement that had been brewing at the time; subsequent reforms to the educa-

tion system helped young Valrath practice greater discipline and have diminished the violent instincts in the general population. In this time, the lrath have survived, though they have not prospered much economically since the dramatic taking of the capital.

The Valrathian Language

Nevertheless, their influence remains to be seen worldwide. Their language remains the most spoken language among the Valrath population, and it is estimated that 80-85% of the Valrath population speaks the lrath language. On Earth, this is the language termed "Standard Valrathian". Certainly, there are hundreds of other languages spoken by Valrath across their world, but lrath zhafal resulted in many of them becoming endangered, and very few of them are spoken in large communities.

All Valrath who come to Earth are fluent in the Standard Valrathian. In fact, there are no known instances of any human hearing a Valrath speak a language other than English or Standard Valrathian.

Valrathian Caste Systems

Many Valrathian states are known to have caste systems. Some form or another is seen in most states, and two of the Great Empires are known to have caste systems. While caste systems vary from state to state, most have two major castes: a warrior caste, and a civilian caste. In virtually all such systems, the warrior caste is considered to be "above" the civilian caste. Those who serve in their state's armies are considered to be "warriors", while all others are considered "civilians".

The lrath's caste system is almost exactly the above – there is a warrior caste and a civilian caste. Unlike many caste systems, however, the castes are not hereditary – a citizen of lrath born to civilians might enlist in the army, and thus rise to the top of the social hierarchy; similarly, a warriors' child might grow up to be a civilian, and thus become a member of the lower caste. Usually, however, those raised by warriors tend to become warriors themselves. Unlike with hereditary caste systems, the proportion of the population that is in each class varies much more by generation. Many civilians will endeavor to become warriors, to improve their social standing. However, the constant war-like nature of lrath life meant that many warriors would be permanently injured, and thus be forced to serve as civilians after sustaining injuries on the battlefield. This left the counts of warriors and civilians somewhat in balance, though as previously noted, the numbers were prone to change much more than with other caste systems. In the past, warriors have made up as little as 35% of the lrath population; however, the warriors were still considered to be the upper echelons of society, and continued to oppress the civilian caste.

In modern times, with the end of lrath zhafal, reforms led by thivgag have led to a significant relaxation of most caste systems. However, remnants of this caste system remain in the language, and likely will continue to do so for a few generations.

Among the other Great Empires:

→ The bashku also have a caste system. It is hereditary, and consists of three castes: a ruling caste, a warrior caste, and a civilian caste. Unlike most other states, however, they

include engineers and other war-adjacent professions to be members of the warrior caste.

→ The mauai do not have a caste system, and have not had one since the beginnings of recorded history.

→ It is unknown whether the aushig have a caste system.

Sounds and Syllables in Standard Valrathian

Sounds and Pronunciations

Although standards vary for how to best transliterate Valrathian into Latin characters, most Valraths here on Earth have adopted a standard convention. This writing system, commonly known as "Anglicized Valrathian", is used throughout this guide. While Anglicized Valrathian vastly differs from the Standard Valrathian script used on their world, it provides an easier introduction to the language for those humans who wish to learn it.

Note that unlike in English, there is no distinction between upper-case and lower-case letters. By convention, all Anglicized Valrathian words are entirely lower-case, except at the beginning of a sentence.

Vowels

In Anglicized Valrathian, each vowel (or contiguous sequence of vowels) refers to a distinct vowel sound; this is in contrast with languages like English, where a single letter can have several distinct sounds depending on the context. The vowels in Standard Valrathian are written as follows:

A	Pronounced like the <i>a</i> in <i>father</i> .
AI	Pronounced like the <i>ai</i> in <i>pain</i> .
AU	Pronounced like the <i>ou</i> in <i>loud</i> .
E	Pronounced like the <i>e</i> in <i>bed</i> .
EE	Pronounced like the <i>ee</i> in <i>feet</i> .
I	Pronounced like the <i>i</i> in <i>bit</i> .
U	Pronounced like the <i>oo</i> in <i>boot</i> .

Consonants

As with vowels, the Anglicized Valrathian maintains a one-to-one correspondence between sounds and symbols, ensuring that the pronunciation of any word can be unambiguously identified by its spelling.

K, G	Pronounced like the <i>c</i> and <i>g</i> in <i>could</i> and <i>good</i> respectively.
P, B	Pronounced like the <i>p</i> and <i>b</i> in <i>pay</i> and <i>bay</i> respectively.
SH, ZH	Pronounced like the <i>sh</i> and <i>s</i> in <i>fishing</i> and <i>fission</i> respectively.
F, V	Pronounced like the <i>f</i> and <i>v</i> in <i>fan</i> and <i>van</i> respectively.
T, D	Pronounced like the <i>t</i> and <i>d</i> in <i>tie</i> and <i>die</i> respectively.

TH	Pronounced like the <i>th</i> in <i>math</i> .
R	Pronounced like the <i>r</i> in <i>red</i> .
L	Pronounced like the <i>l</i> in <i>lead</i> .
M, N, NG	Pronounced like the <i>m</i> , the first <i>n</i> and the <i>ng</i> in <i>meaning</i> .

Note that in some accents *sh* is instead pronounced like the *ch* in *char*, and *zh* like the *j* in *jar*.

Voicing

Some Valrathian sounds are sometimes distinguished as being voiced or voiceless. In the above list, when sounds are listed in pairs (e.g., *k* and *g*), the first is called *voiceless*, and the second *voiced*. In Valrathian, "voicing" a voiceless consonant constitutes replacing it with its corresponding voiced version. "Voicing" a larger construct (a syllable/word/etc) constitutes voicing all voiceless consonants in it. For instance, *kaish* → *gaizh*. Similarly, decoiving involves changing voiced consonants to voiceless ones. These are linguistic construct used for various grammatical purposes (see: [articles in Valrathian](#)).

Non-Contrastive Sounds

While Valrathian has a significant inventory of consonants, many of the consonants are *non-contrastive*, in that they can be interchanged within a word without affecting the meaning. For an English analogy, consider "Yes?" and "Yes." in English—the vowels in two words have different tones ("Yes?" is a rising pitch, while "Yes." is not), but an English speaker would recognize them to be the same word; in this manner, we say that *tone* is non-contrastive in English.

Similarly, Valrathian contains many consonants that do not contrast with each other. In particular, consonants listed together in the above list are non-contrastive (in particular, voicing is non-contrastive; additionally, *m*, *n* and *ng* do not contrast). So, for instance, a Valrathian would recognize *peeng* and *beem* to be the same word, despite slightly different pronunciations. This gives Valrathian an "error-correcting" nature – a fluent speaker can often mishear one (or several) consonants in a syllable, and still understand the correct meanings. This property allows Valrathian, a language developed on a war-ravaged world, to be heard clearly even in the loud commotion of a ground battle.

Syllables

Valrathian syllables are relatively simple, unlike English. Valrathian syllables consist of a vowel, which is optionally preceded or followed by one consonant. This is in contrast to languages like English (for instance, the word *strings* has three consonant sounds preceding the vowel, and two following it), which often have much more complex syllable structures. *Occasionally*, Valrathian syllables will have two consonants preceding (but never following) a vowel; this, however, is rare, and it is primarily seen only in proper nouns.

In Anglicized Valrathian, periods are sometimes written between syllables. For instance, the name of the species might be written *val.rath* in Anglicized Valrathian. The word "Valrathian"

as pronounced in English cannot be represented in Anglicized Valrathian (for instance, the vowel represented by *ia* is not in the language); however, most Valrathians would pronounce it *val.ra.thee.an* if asked.

In this guide, this convention is usually used; however, in the previous section, this convention is dropped: *val.ra.thee.an* is instead simply written *valratheean*. In English prose containing isolated Valrathian words and phrases, this is usually how they are written.

Stress

Valrathian words always have their primary stress on the first syllable of the word (*VAL.rath*, not *val.RATH*), unless the word starts with a vowel, in which primary stress is on the second syllable (*au.SHIG*).

Parts of Speech

Nouns

Grammatical Numbers

Valrathian, like most other languages, features markers for plural nouns. However, rather than just being marked as singular or plural, nouns are marked as singular, "few" or "many". If the count of some noun is something one could conceivably count by hand, it is considered "few". Otherwise it is considered many. If a noun is "few" or "many", this is marked with a word that precedes the noun – "few" is marked with the word *man*, while "many" is marked with the word *zhan*. For instance, in referring to the population of a single household, one might say *man valrath*; when referring to the population of a country, one might say *zhan valrath*.

Articles

In speech, Valrathian nouns can sometimes be indicated to have a definite article (e.g., *the*). This is done by devoicing the initial consonant of the noun. If the noun starts with a vowel (e.g., *ai*), a voiceless consonant (e.g., *sh*), or a consonant which does not have a corresponding voiceless consonant (e.g., *r*), this has no effect; in such cases, the definiteness of the article is typically inferred from context.

In formal Valrathian, the prefix *pu-* can be affixed to a word to indicate the definite article; similarly, the prefix *gai-* can be affixed to a word to indicate the indefinite article. However, this is rarely used in everyday speech, except in cases where the speaker wants to draw attention to or emphasize the article.

Both in the case of devoicing, or in the case of prefixation, the modifier goes on the verb itself, *not* the grammatical number marker listed above.

For proper nouns, no devoicing takes place, and proper nouns are never accompanied with an article of any sort.

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) <i>man val.rath</i>
FEW warrior
a few warriors | (2) <i>zhan fal.rath</i>
MANY (DEVOICED)warrior
the many warriors |
| (3) <i>zhan gai-val.rath</i>
FEW DEF-warrior
many warriors | (4) <i>man pu-val.rath</i>
MANY INDEF-warrior
the few warriors |

Possessives

Like in English, in Valrathian nouns can be indicated as being "possessed" by another noun. English typically indicates this in one of two ways – appending the 's suffix to the possessor (e.g., *the warrior's weapon*), or in the form [possessee of possessor] (e.g., *weapon of the warrior*).

Valrathian, in contrast, uses suffix marker *-zhag* solely on the possessee, and places the possessee before the possessor.

- (1) *veth.ee-zhag val.rath*
weapon-POSS warrior
a warrior's weapon

Note that definite or indefinite articles can be placed on any (or all) of the nouns in a possessive chain.

- | | |
|---|---|
| (2) <i>gai-ve.thee-zhag pu-val.rath</i>
DEF-weapon-POSS INDEF-warrior
The weapon of a warrior | (3) <i>pu-ve.thee-zhag gai-val.rath</i>
INDEF-weapon-POSS DEF-warrior
A weapon of the warrior |
|---|---|

Pronouns

Pronouns in Valrathian fall into two major categories – personal pronouns and possessive pronouns. Personal pronouns are equivalents of English pronouns like "I", "you", etc. Valrathian uses the same pronouns when the pronoun is in the subject or object, so there is no distinction as in the English distinction between "she"/"her".

Personal Pronouns

A personal pronoun is placed where a noun would be, in a sentence. The pronoun used depends on the person of the subject/object ("I" vs "you" vs "he/she/them"), the caste of the subject/object, and in some cases on the grammatical numbers.

↓ Person	Caste →	Warrior	Civilian	None (Inanimate)
1 st Person (singular)		<i>meng.ka</i>	<i>meng.pa</i>	
1 st Person (few or many)		<i>meng.ka</i>	<i>meng.pa</i>	-
2 nd Person (singular)		<i>mezg.ga</i>	<i>mezg.ba</i>	
2 nd Person (few or many)		<i>mezg.ga</i>	<i>mezg.ba</i>	-
3 rd Person (singular)		<i>thav.ga</i>	<i>thav.ba</i>	<i>thav</i>
3 rd Person (few or many)		<i>raif.ka</i>	<i>raif.pa</i>	<i>raif</i>

In cases where the pronoun refers to multiple valrath of different castes, the civilian form of the pronoun is used if there is even a single civilian in the group. Children are treated as warriors for grammatical purposes (indeed, most of them go on to become warriors) before they are old enough to decide on a profession. In the rare case where the third person pronoun refers to a group containing both animate and inanimate objects, the pronoun *raif.pai* is used instead.

Possessive Pronouns

Possessives where the possessor or possessee is a pronoun are treated like nouns: the *-zhag* suffix is added.

- (1) *veth.ee-zhag meng.pa*
 weapon-POSS 1SG.CIV
 My weapon

(Note: In the above example, the speaker is a civilian, as seen by their usage of *meng.pa* rather than *meng.ka*.)

This can also be done if the possessee (or even both possessor and possessee) are pronouns. If a weapon is being talked about, then *thav* ("it") could be used to refer to it. If I want to refer to said weapon as "my weapon", I can say *thav-zhag meng.pa*. A literal translation into English would be nonsensical (it would mean something like "my it"), but a more accurate translation would be "it (which is mine)".

Other Pronouns

There are other miscellaneous pronouns in Valrathian:

- *Ai*: This represents the usage of "it" English when there is no particular subject to a sentence. For instance, the sentence "it is raining" has no particular subject. In such a case, the pronoun *ai* is used as the subject.

Verbs

In Valrathian, verbs take on multiple forms, depending on both the subject of the action and the tense of the verb.

Infinitives

Most verbs in Valrathian fall into two categories. Most verbs are called *-aith* verbs – these verbs have an infinitive ending with the suffix *-aith*. For instance, the verb *gur.aith* is the verb "to flee". Other verbs are *-ir* verbs, such as *geeb.ir* ("to eat") and *rail.ir* ("to have"). Each verb is conjugated in a different form (outlined in the various sections below).

Verbs precede the subject. If they have an object, the word *lau* is added after the subject, and the object follows the subject.

- (1) *rail.i gar lau veth.ee*
 to-have.PRES Gar weapon
 Gar has a weapon

There is one exception, however. There is *no* word for the verb "to be". Rather, the verb is just dropped from a sentence.

- (2) *gar lau val.rath*
 Gar warrior
 Gar is a warrior.

Past/Present Tense

Valrathian grammar does not distinguish between the past and present tense. The Valrath place great emphasis on their histories and legends, and so happenings of the past are often treated like they are still happening, without especially distinguishing between claims like "Lrath was a great empire" and "Lrath is a great empire". In most cases, it is clear from context whether a statement is referring to the past or the present.

Verbs are also conjugated when used in the past or present tense. In particular, the ending of the verb varies depending on the grammatical number of the subject. These endings are regular and depend only on whether the verb is an *-aith* verb or an *-ir* verb.

<i>-aith</i> verbs		<i>-ir</i> verbs	
Subject	Ending	Subject	Ending
Singular	<i>-aid</i>	Singular	<i>-i</i>
Few	<i>-aid</i>	Few	<i>-ee</i>
Many	<i>-ai</i>	Many	<i>-eer</i>

- (1) *rail.i meng.ka lau zhan veth.ee* (2) *rail.ee meng.ka lau zhan veth.ee*
 to-have.PRES 1SG.WAR many weapon to-have.PRES 1FEW.WAR many weapon
 I have many weapons We (few) have many weapons
- (3) *rail.eer meng.ka lau zhan veth.ee*
 to-have.PRES 1MANY.WAR many weapon
 We (many) have many weapons

Note that in the above examples, the only differences are the conjugation for the verb *rail.ir*. Since the first person pronoun is the same for all grammatical numbers, the verb conjugation is what identifies the grammatical number of the subject. Also, each of the above could have meant "I/we *had*" (i.e., past tense). The difference can primarily only be made clear through context.

Example conjugations for an *-ir* verb are as follows.

- (1) *gur.aid meng.ka*
 to-flee.PAST 1SG/FEW.WAR
 I fled / We (few) fled
- (2) *gur.ai meng.ka*
 to-flee.PAST 1MANY.WAR
 We (many) fled

Future Tense

Conjugating a verb in the future tense is similar to the way conjugation works in the past or present tenses, but with different endings.

<i>-aith</i> verbs		<i>-ir</i> verbs	
Subject	Ending	Subject	Ending
Singular	<i>-esh</i>	Singular	<i>-ish</i>
Few	<i>-aiv</i>	Few	<i>-eev</i>
Many	<i>-aik</i>	Many	<i>-eek</i>

Negating Verbs

When negative a verb, adding the word *dair* before the verb serves the same purpose as "not" in English.

- (1) *gur.ai meng.ka*
to-flee.PAST 1MANY.WAR
We fled
- (2) *dair gur.ai meng.ka*
not to-flee.PAST 1MANY.WAR
We did not flee

Adjectives

Adjectives describing a particular noun follow the noun itself. When multiple adjectives are used for the same noun, adjectives are order from "most permanent to most transient". For instance, when describing an individual as young and also intelligent, the adjective for intelligent precedes the adjective for young, since an individual will presumably stay intelligent longer than they will stay young. This is a somewhat subjective notion, so there is no notion of "grammatically incorrect" orders of adjectives. However, a speaker can draw attention to the transience of a specific adjective by placing it last – for instance, calling a king "the current, healthy ruler" (rather than "the healthy current ruler") is seen as an insult, and insinuates that they will not remain healthy for much longer.

Conjunctions

There are two major kinds of conjunctions in Valrathian. The first is conjunctions that join independent clauses ("the cat slept *and* the dog slept"), while the second is conjunctions that join nouns ("the cat *and* dog slept").

Independent Clause Conjunctions

Conjunctions are placed between the two independent clauses (each of which is of the form [verb subject *lau* object]). There are several conjunctions:

English	Valrathian
And	<i>meng</i>
Or	<i>thair</i>
But	<i>rau</i>
Because	<i>vee</i>
Then	<i>la.sha</i>
When	<i>la.pan</i>

(1) *gur.ai meng.ka*
 to-flee.PAST 1SG.WAR
 I fled

(2) *gur.ai mezh.ga*
 to-flee.PAST 2SG.WAR
 You fled

(1) *gur.ai meng.ka meng gur.ai mezh.ga*
 to-flee.PAST 1SG.WAR and to-flee.PAST 2SG.WAR
 I fled and you fled

(2) *gur.ai meng.ka vee gur.ai mezh.ga*
 to-flee.PAST 1SG.WAR because to-flee.PAST 2SG.WAR
 I fled because you fled

When starting a sentence with a conjunction, the word for the conjunction is duplicated

(3) *meng meng gur.ai mezh.ga*
 and to-flee.PAST 2SG.WAR
 And you fled

Prepositions

Prepositional phrases can affect verbs or nouns. In English, prepositional phrases on verbs are along the lines of "the cat slept *on the floor*", while prepositional phrases on nouns look like "the cat *on the floor* slept".

Prepositions on Verbs

Some verbs necessarily take multiple objects ("gave [*the book*] [*to the student*]") while in other instances the verb is described by an optional prepositional phrase. In both such cases, the prepositional phrase appears immediately after the verb.

Prepositions on Nouns

Prepositional phrases follow the noun in a noun phrase, and any nouns in the prepositional phrase follows the preposition itself (like in English, with "on the floor").

(1) *fal.rath*
 (DEVOICED)person
 the person

(2) *fal.rath ga.ka au*
 (DEVOICED)PERSON on au
 the person on au

Sentence Structure

A basic sentence in Valrathian is of the form [verb subject *lau* object], where *lau* is a Valrathian word used to separate the subject from the object in a sentence. In sentences with no object, the syntax is simply [verb subject].

Sentences as Objects

In some sentences, the object of a sentence is itself a sentence of its own. This is analogous to English sentences of the form "thivgag thinks *the war will end*". In such cases, the sentence would have syntax [verb subject *lalau* sentence-object].

- (1) *bu.pesh lrath*
to-end.FUT war
The war will end
- (2) *zhi thivgag lalau bu.pesh lrath*
to-think.PRES thivgag to-end.FUT war
Thivgag thinks the war will end

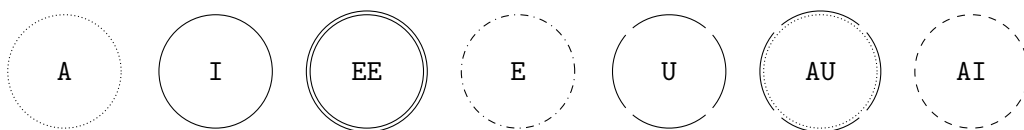
Imperative

When speaking in the imperative form, the entire verb is voiced.

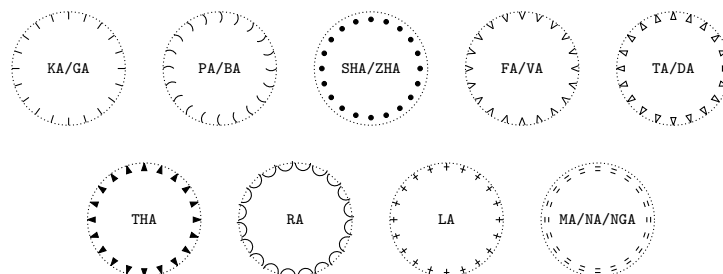
Writing System

The Valrathian writing system is a rotationally symmetric system where each sentence is a series of concentric circles. Each circle or circular structure represents a single syllable, with the typography of the circle representing the vowel, with additional "annotations" depicting the consonants around that vowel. Concentric circles are read "inside out", so that a single sentence is represented with a single series of concentric circles.

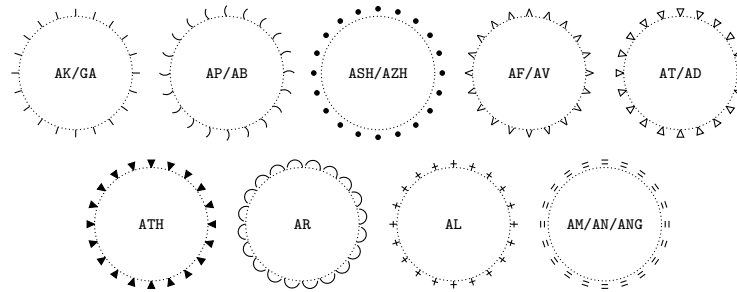
The vowels are represented as follows:



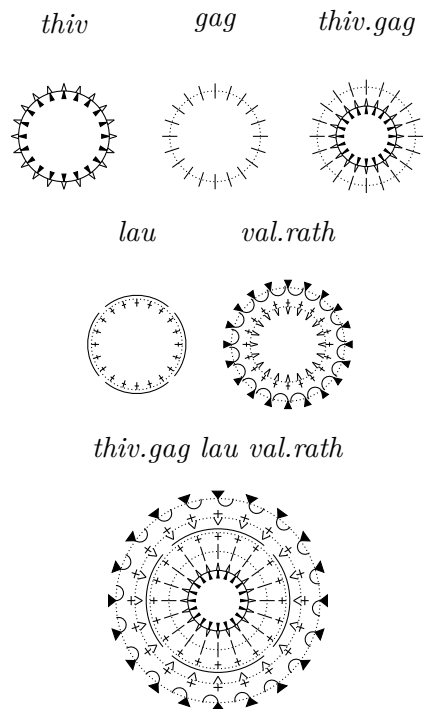
Additionally, consonants within a syllable are represented as additional marks "attached" to the circles. Consonants preceding the vowel and marked on the inside, and consonants succeeding the vowel are marked on the outside.



Similarly, marks are placed on the outside for consonants following a vowel.



These marks are then combined to form syllables, and syllables to form larger words or sentences.



Note that there are no word separators, and that entire sentences can be read in one go. Furthermore, there is no "correct" orientation for a piece of writing – rather, a written page could be read sideways, up-side down, or at virtually any orientation.

As a result, the Valrath use paper-thin circular tablets to write sentences on. Like all reasonable writing media, these are available in different sizes, and are relatively lightweight. Valrath tend to carry large stacks of tablets, each containing a single sentence – they carry with them cylindrical containers that fit such tablets; these are akin to folders on Earth. Books and other larger writings are sold in such containers.

Appendix: Minister Thivgag

What follows is the first paragraph of minister thivgag's biography.

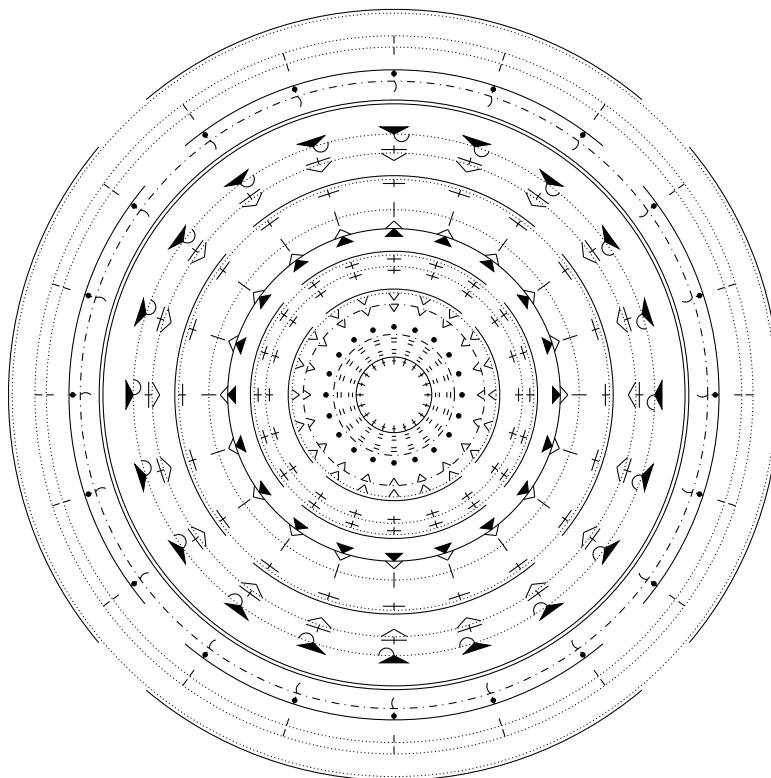
Of all the Valrath to grace the planet of au, thivgag will surely be remembered as the greatest of them all. He came to us at a time when the Valrath had stagnated, and we were obsessed with our violent tendencies. It was a dark time. But Thivgag was a shining light, and he saved us from ourselves.

Below is the original text, transcribed into Standard Valrathian. Each sentence is glossed and annotated with its English translation.

- (1) *ling.mesh vu.fau la.lau thiv.gag lau fal.rath ee.bezh.gu ga.ka au*
 to-remember.FUT everyone thivgag (DEVOICED)person greatest on au
 Of all the Valrath to grace the planet of au, thivgag will surely be remembered as the greatest of them all.
- (2) *thau.pi ga meng.pa thav.ba la.pan gai.rai fal.rath meng*
 to-come.PAST to 1MANY.CIV 3SG.CIV when to-stagnate.PAST (DEVOICED)valrath and
thee.ai zhash ga.veed-zhag meng.pa meng.pa
 to-obsess.PAST with violence-POSS 1MANY.CIV 1MANY.CIV
 He came to us at a time when the Valrath had stagnated, and we were obsessed with our violent tendencies.
- (3) *ai lau i.fee.va.la beesh*
 it time dark
 It was a dark time.
- (4) *rau rau thiv.gag lau mau.tau.gu meng dazh.aid thu.feer meng.pa thav.ba*
 but thivgag bright light and to-save.PAST against ourselves 3SG.CIV
 But Thivgag was a shining light, and he saved us from ourselves.

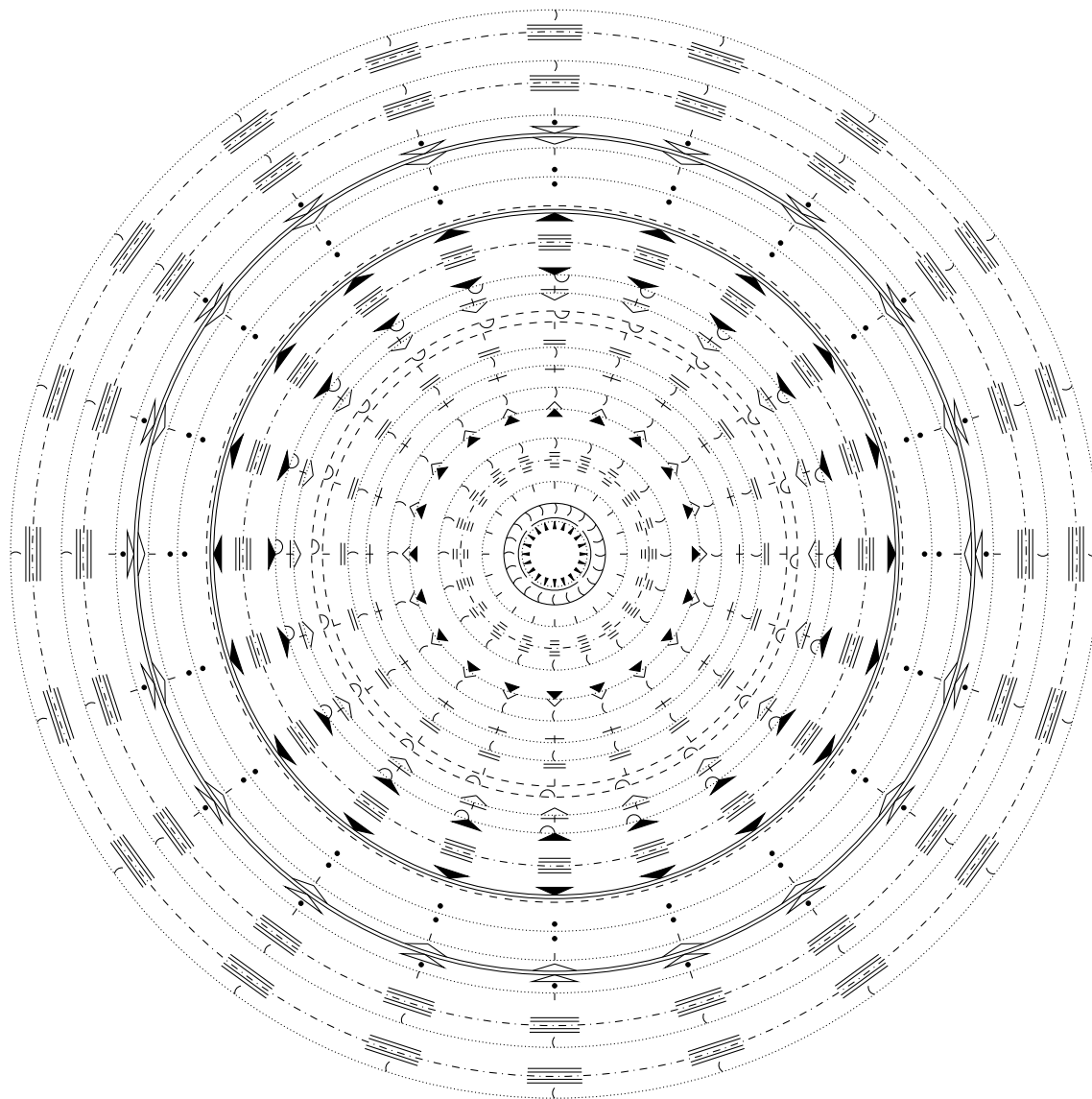
Editor's Note: The biography above was written by thivgag's longtime friend, and thus should be taken with a grain of salt. The passage is included here not for its historical accuracy, but primarily to provide practice on reading and translating Valrathian text.

A reproduction of the above in the original Valrathian script can be found on the next pages.



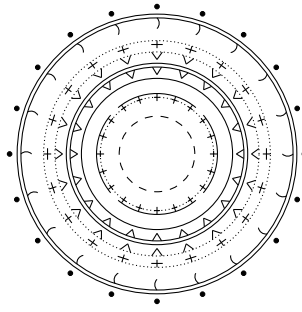
ling.mesh vu.fau la.lau thiv.gag lau fal.rath ee.bezh.gu ga.ka au

Of all the Valrath to grace the planet of au, thivgag will surely be remembered as the greatest of them all.

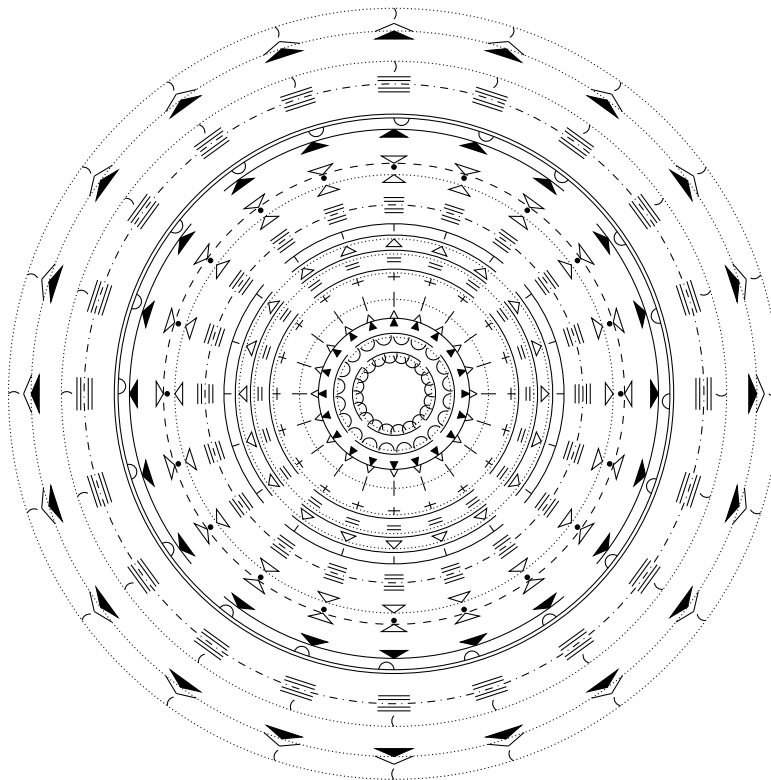


*thau.pi ga meng.pa thav.ba la.pan gai.rai fal.rath meng thee.ai zhash ga.veed-zhag meng.pa
meng.pa*

He came to us at a time when the Valrath had stagnated, and we were obsessed with our violent tendencies.



ai lau i.fee.va.la beesh
It was a dark time.



rau rau thiv.gag lau mau.tau.gu meng dazh.aid thu.feer meng.pa thav.ba
But Thivgag was a shining light, and he saved us from ourselves.

Appendix: Dictionary

The following is a list of all Valrathian words present in this document.

Word		Meaning
au	(n.)	The Valrath planet
au.shig	(n.)	One of the Great Empires
bash.ku	(n.)	One of the Great Empires
beesh	(adj.)	Dark
bu.paith	(v.)	To end
dair	(conj.)	Not
dazh.aith	(v.)	To rescue
ee.bezh	(adj.)	Great
ee.bezh.gu	(adj.)	Greatest
ga	(prep.)	To
ga.ka	(prep.)	On
ga.veed	(v.)	violence
gai.raith	(v.)	To stagnate
geeb.ir	(v.)	To eat
gur.aith	(v.)	To flee
i.fee.va.la	(n.)	Era
la.lau	(prep.)	Delimiter between subject and sentence-as-object in a larger sentence
la.pan	(conj.)	When
la.sha	(conj.)	Then
lau	(prep.)	Delimiter between subject and object in sentence
ling.maith	(v.)	To remember
lrath	(n.)	War
	(n.)	One of the Great Empires
man	(adj.)	Few
mau.ai	(n.)	One of the Great Empires
mau.tau	(n.)	Light
meng	(conj.)	And
meng.ka	(pr.)	First person warrior pronoun
meng.pa	(pr.)	First person civilian pronoun
mezh.ba	(pr.)	Second person civilian pronoun
mezh.ga	(pr.)	Second person warrior pronoun
raif	(pr.)	Third person plural inanimate pronoun
raif.ka	(pr.)	Third person plural warrior pronoun
raif.pa	(pr.)	Third person plural civilian pronoun
raif.pai	(pr.)	Third person singular mixed pronoun
rail.ir	(v.)	To have
rau	(conj.)	But
thair	(conj.)	Or
thau.pir	(v.)	To come
thav	(pr.)	Third person singular inanimate pronoun
thav.ba	(pr.)	Third person singular civilian pronoun
thav.ga	(pr.)	Third person singular warrior pronoun
thee.aith	(v.)	To obsess

thu.feer	(prep.)	Against
val.rath	(n.)	Name of the species
	(n.)	Person
	(n.)	Warrior
vee	(conj.)	Because
veth.ee	(n.)	Weapon
vu.fau	(pr.)	Everyone
zhaf.al	(adj.)	Everlasting
zhan	(adj.)	Many
zhash	(prep.)	With
zhing.da	(n.)	Capital of Irath
zhir	(v.)	To think

Works Cited

- Carroll, Lewis, and John Minnion. *Jabberwocky: Lewis Carroll's Poem*. London: The artist, 1975. Print.
- Childres, Isaac. *Gloomhaven: Jaws of the Lion*. Cephalofair Games, 2020. Print.
- LeGuin, Ursula K. *The Tombs of Atuan*. Bantam Books, 1975.
- Okrand, Marc. *The Klingon Dictionary*. Pocket, 1992.
- Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Penguin Classics, 2021.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "Appendix E: Writing and Spelling." *The Lord of the Rings*, HarperCollinsPublishers, London, 2014.

