

(Student's Name)

### The Morphosemantics of Noldorin Elvish

I will be conducting a morphosemantic analysis of Tolkien's Elvish language. In other words, I will be looking for patterns and grammar rules in the language by cataloguing vocabulary and analyzing the roots, prefixes, and suffixes of the words. Within J.R.R. Tolkien's book *The Lost Road and Other Writings*, there is a section devoted to the etymologies of the Elvish language he created. This is where I will find the vocabulary and its English translations. I will then compile the vocabulary, pronunciations, and translations into an English-to-Elvish dictionary along with the Elvish morphology. In addition to acquiring the vocabulary and analyzing the morphology, I will also be researching other groups and websites who have done something similar. Many Tolkien or Elvish websites (such as "The Council of Elrond" and "RealElvish.net") are created by fans and not trained linguists, so I will analyze a selection of them to determine how linguistically sound they are.

Why Elvish? I have no experience in linguistics because I am still a freshman completing her general education requirements. I have not had the chance to take any relevant classes, let alone do fieldwork. Because Tolkien's Elvish is a fictional language, I do not have to actually learn the language or talk to a native speaker (of which there are none). This project is simple enough that I will be able to learn the necessary technical tools as I go. It will also allow me to go through the steps of learning to do linguistic fieldwork research, including learning existing words from dictionaries, checking other published grammar sources to help me, forming questions and hypotheses, and working with the primary data to test those hypotheses. In doing this, I will be reflecting on topics like the essential properties of human language and gain a familiarity with scholarly work on constructed languages.

I became an English major because of my interest in linguistics. There is no linguistics major at MTSU; however, MTSU is currently beginning to expand its offerings in linguistics. I intend to spread awareness about the subject by presenting my completed project at the Celebration of Student Writing in April. Because Tolkien's books (and the corresponding films) have such a large fan base, it will be an effective promotional tool to encourage participation in the linguistics field. My long-term goal for this research project is that it will become an educational resource, something fun that can be used to introduce linguistics to students, or anyone who wishes to learn about the subject.

What I am doing goes beyond the courses offered at this university. This research project is unique because it does not fit into any available classes here at MTSU. Currently, I am taking a class on Tolkien and Rowling. While we do read and discuss *The Lord of the Rings*, there is no opportunity to dive deeper into the Elvish language, or any other languages of Middle-earth. This project does not obviously map to a project I might do in any of the linguistics courses that MTSU is currently offering. To the best of my knowledge, there has not been any prior URECA grant for linguistics or for work on Tolkien.

My faculty mentor, Dr. Amanda Swenson, is an expert in linguistics and fieldwork. I will be meeting with her once a week to share my progress on the project and to discuss linguistic fieldwork. During these meetings, I will present the new words and rules for the week and discuss basic theory/methodology readings. I aim to finish my research project before April 24<sup>th</sup> so that I can present it at the Celebration of Student Writing. Beyond that, I am interested in applying for a summer or fall grant to expand this project and further develop my skills in linguistic research.

## Timeline

The 50-minute weekly meetings with my mentor are on the dates as follows:

Week 1 – Feb. 18th: Present at least 20 vocabulary items (in dictionary entry format) and rules/patterns (presented in a handout); discuss selections from Bower (ch1, 8, 13) & O’Grady et al ch 4

Week 2—Feb. 25th: Add at least 20 new vocabulary items to dictionary and and rules/patterns to handout; continue to revise handout; discuss Destruel reading part 1

Week 3—March 3rd: Add at least 20 new vocabulary items to dictionary and and rules/patterns to handout; continue to revise handout; discuss Destruel reading part 2

Week 4—March 10th: Add at least 20 new vocabulary items to dictionary and and rules/patterns to handout; continue to revise handout; discuss Ryan reading

Week 5—March 17th: Add at least 20 new vocabulary items to dictionary and and rules/patterns to handout; continue to revise handout; discuss Wahlgren reading

Week 6—March 24th: Add at least 20 new vocabulary items to dictionary and and rules/patterns to handout; continue to revise handout; discuss Sanders reading

Week 7—March 31st: Add at least 20 new vocabulary items to dictionary and and rules/patterns to handout; continue to revise handout; discuss reading TBD

Week 8—April 7th: Begin creating an interactive presentation for the Celebration of Student Writing; continue to refine handout

Week 9—April 14th: Continue work on interactive presentation and handout

Week 10—April 21st: Finalize handout and interactive presentation

April 24th: Present project at the Celebration of Student Writing

## References

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