



**Subtle Seeds:**  
a look at the hyphenated words of *The Hobbit*

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*A Tolkien Concordance  
And hotlinks to Works Cited, these slides, and details  
of this project:*

<https://wordsthatyouweresaying.blog/>

*In the course of my project, I noticed...*

## Hyphens - Tools of Agglutination

“Germanic languages allow compounding by simply adding ... nouns together (or adding adjectives to nouns) to make another, usually semantically related, word.”

~Michael Drout

“adding elements... to a base root without any morphological change to the root or the added elements”

~ J.R.R. Tolkien

Part of the normal development of compound words:

*Fire-place* → *Fireplace*

### **Are Tolkien's hyphenated words remarkable?**

Commonly used in Fantasy since the 1800s

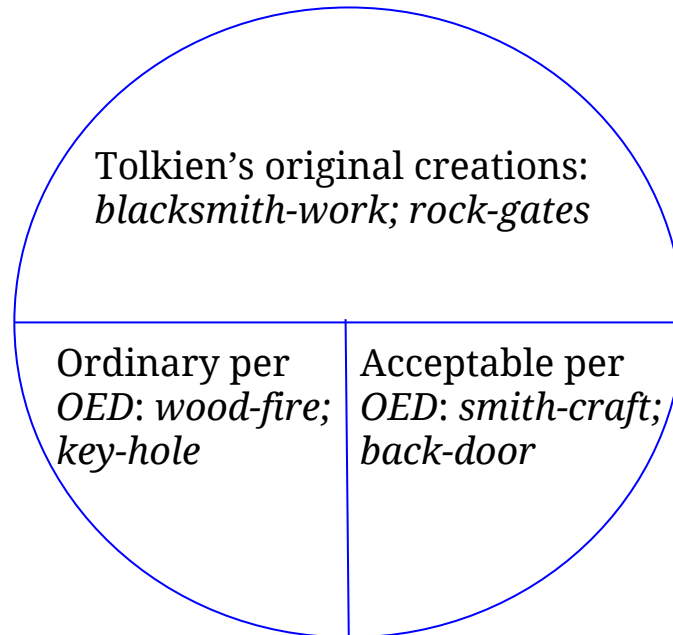
Morris: swellings-up; flood-tide; wain-burg; woman's-door

Morris' onomastics: Mirkwood-water; Upper-mark;  
Mid-mark; Nether-mark; Hall-Sun; Folk-Wolf; Wood-Sun

**Is Tolkien's rate of using these words remarkable?**

Used at a very slightly lesser rate than Carrol did in  
*Through the Looking Glass*.

**Are the words themselves remarkable?**



How does Tolkien use those hyphenated words?

Used for

- Onomastics
- Description of the physical world
- Description of the fantastic nature of the world
- *All to a special purpose!*



## **Onomastics:**

*Under-Hill*

*Bag-End*

*Barrel-rider*

*Clue-finder*

*Foe-hammer*

*Goblin-Cleaver*

*Sackville-Baggins*

*Took-clan*

*Web-cutter*

## Physical World: Visual

*Bat-cloud, Bell-shaped, Black-haired, Coal-black, Comfortable-looking, Cross-legged, **Dark-green**, **Dark-grey**, Deep-set, Drum-shaped, Fat-bodied, Figure-eights, **Grass-green**, Helter-skelter, Hind-legs, Lamp-like, Lightning-flashes, Low-seated, **Moss-green**, New-hewn, Old-looking, **Pitch-dark**, **Red-golden**, **Red-stained**, Round-bellied, **Silver-grey**, **Sky-blue**, Sky-high, Suspicious-looking, Swift-flying, Torch-light, Ugly-looking, Weather-stained, Well-armed, Well-groomed, Wide-armed, Wide-sweeping*

### Physical World: Time, Scent

*Breakfast-time, Forest-day, Fourth-day, Good-night,  
May-sunshine, May-time, Mid-day, Mid-winter,  
Midsummer-eve, Supper-time, Tea-time, To-day,  
Yule-tide*

*Hobbit-smell, Honey-smelling, Wood-fire, Wood-fires,  
Worm-stench*

**Physical World: Sound  
Descriptions, Onomatopoeia, and  
Vocables**

*Forest-silence, Blood-curdling, Deep-throated,  
Owl-noises*

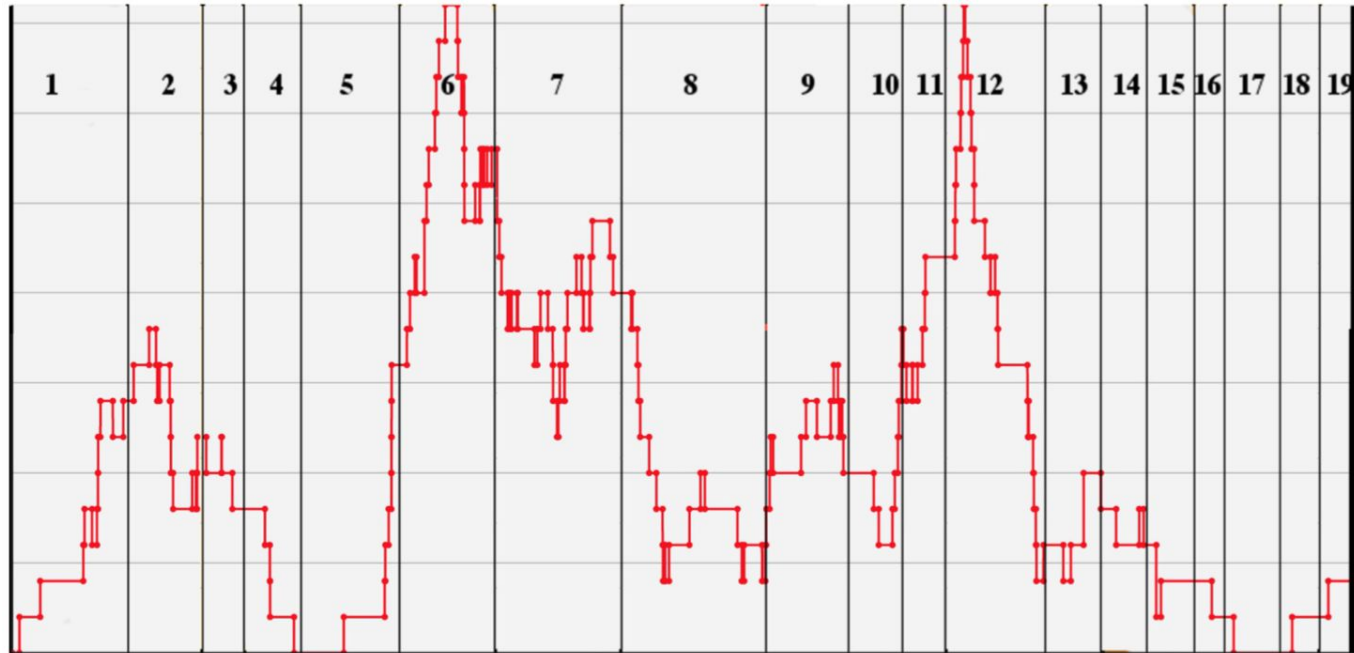
*S-s-s-s-s, Clink-clink, Ding-dong-a-ling-dang, Rat-tat,  
Zig-zag*

*Fa-la, Fa-la-la-lally, Roll-roll-rolling, Tra-la-la-lally,  
Tril-lil-lil-lolly, Ya-harri-hey*

## Physical World: Landscape

*Battle-ground, Autumn-like, Barn-owl, Bear-tracks, Bee-pastures, Beech-logs, Cavern-mouth, Cliff-wall, Deep-piled, Far-distant, Far-off, Fir-trees, Forest-floor, Forest-gate, Forest-gloom, Forest-path, Forest-river, Forest-road, Forest-roof, Forest-track, Grass-land, Grassy-floored, Hill-side, Lone-lands, Mountain-gates, Mountain-king, Mountain-palace, Mountain-paths, Mountain-roots, Mountain-shadowed, Mountain-side, Mountain-slopes, Mountain-spur, Mountain-stream, Mountain-top, Mountain-wall, Oak-trunk, Oak-wood, Oak-woods, Out-of-doors, Pine-cones, Pine-needles, Pine-roots, Pine-torch, Pine-tree, Pine-woods, Rabbit-cropped, Rabbit-hole, River-shores, River-valley, Rock-face, Rock-shadows, Rock-wall, Screech-owl, Sea-sighing, Snail-covered, Snow-peaks, Snow-white, South-pointing, Steep-sided, Steep-walled, Stone-paved, Stone-slide, Thorn-bush, Thorn-hedge, Thunder-battle, Tree-stems, Tree-top, Tree-trunk, Valley-side, Water-gate*

## Physical World: Landscape



## Fantasy World: Objects

*Arrow-storm, Arrow-wound, Banner-bearers, Battering-ram,  
Bow-string, Drinking-bowls, Drinking-horns, Gold-plated,  
Dungeon-hall, Moon-letters, Rune-letters, Silver-hafted, Sword-blade,  
Tinder-boxes, Two-handed, Two-handled*

## Fantasy World: Creatures

*Bird-speech, Eagle-lord, Noble-hearted, Giant-size, Raven-messengers, Skin-changer, Thrush-language, Vampire-like, Warg-skin, Were-worms*

*Wolf-allies, Wolf-glade, Wolf-guards, Wolf-riders, Wolf-ring*

*Dragon-fire, Dragon-gold, Dragon-guarded, Dragon-haunted, Dragon-hoard, Dragon-lore, Dragon-mountain, Dragon-noises, Dragon-shooter, Dragon-sickness, Dragon-slayer, Dragon-slayings, Dragon-spell, Dragon-talk*

*Spider-colony, Spider-poison, Spider-rope, Spider-string, Spider-thread, Spider-webs*



## Fantasy World: Cultures - Language

*A-arguing, A-roaming, A-sneakin', A-struggling,  
A-talkin', A-thinkin', A-wagging*

From Anglo-Saxon On+ gerund

Used by

- Spiders
- Trolls
- Tra-la-la-Lally Elves

### **Fantasy World: Cultures - Goblin**

*Goblin-chains, Goblin-cities, Goblin-cleaver,  
Goblin-drivers, Goblin-dwelling, Goblin-guards,  
Goblin-hall, Goblin-infested, Goblin-raid, Goblin-town,  
Goblin-tunnels, Goblin-wars*

*Bad-hearted, Tunnel-walls.*

*Goblin-imp*

## **Fantasy World: Material Culture**

*Gate-guards, Raft-steerers.*

*Easy-tempered, Fire-place, Trestle-tables.*

*Birthday-present*

## Fantasy World: Culture - Dwarves

*Dwarf-fashion, Dwarf-king, Dwarf-lad, Dwarf-linked, Dwarf-lord,  
Dwarf-mail, Dwarf-messenger, Dwarf-ridden*

*Blacksmith-work, High-quality, Thrice-forged, Smooth-floored,  
Smooth-sided*

## Fantasy World: Culture - Elves

*Deep-elves, Elf-caves, Elf-charge, Elf-fires, Elf-friend,  
Elf-guards, Elf-host, Elf-king, Elf-lord, Elf-maiden,  
Elf-prince, Elf-road, Elven-harps, Elvish-looking,  
Light-elves, Raft-elves, Sea-elves, Wood-elf*

*Toss-pots, Story-telling*

*A-wagging, A-roaming*

## Fantasy World: Culture - Elves

*Tra-la-la-lally, Tril-lil-lil-lolly...*

*Corey Olsen considers the lexicality of the “burst of song like laughter through the trees:... O! tra-la-la-lally/ here down in the valley!” (91)*

*“What sense,” Olsen writes, “are we to make of the last two lines? The last line, “here down in the valley,” sounds like a completion of a thought, but which one? What is “down in the valley”? The syntax of the lines suggests, bizarrely, that “tra-la-la-lally,” which sounded at first like merely rhythmic syllables without meaning, actually stands as the subject and verb of that sentence. In some sense inscrutable to mere mortals, “tra-la-la-lally” would seem to be what is happening “down in the valley.” (57).*

***Fantasy World: even a hint of  
foreshadowing***

***Bard of Laketown:  
Grim-faced, Grim-voiced***

## **Fantasy World: Culture - Hobbits**

*Hobbit-boy, Hobbit-girls, Hobbit-hole, Hobbit-lands,  
Hobbit-legs, Hobbit-smell*



### Fantasy World: Culture - Food

*After-supper, Apple-tart, Beer-barrels, Beer-mug,  
Clay-pipe, Dining-room, Dish-covers, Dream-dinners,  
Egg-question, Egg-shaped, Food-bags, Food-supplies,  
Frying-pan, Hawthorn-berries, Mince-pies, Pork-pie,  
Seed-cake, Smoke-ring, Tobacco-jar, Twice-baked,  
Water-skin, Well-filled, Wine-barrels, Drinking-bowls,  
Drinking-horns*

**Tolkien uses hyphenated words to reveal**

- **Onomastics**
- **Physical World**
- **Fantasy World**

***So what?***

**The Frame Narrative  
is revealed by subtle seeds**

**Gorm**

**Uaine**

**Gorm**  
*Blue*

**Uaine**  
*Green*

**Gorm -**  
*gorgeous-weather-color*

**Let's remember the importance of language in the narrative:**

*“At first they had passed through hobbit- lands, a wide respectable country inhabited by decent folk, with good roads, an inn or two, and now and then a dwarf or a farmer ambling by on business. Then they came to lands where people spoke strangely, and sang songs Bilbo had never heard before.” [02.028]*

## The Frame Narrative

***THE HOBBIT OR THERE AND BACK  
AGAIN BEING THE RECORD OF A YEARS  
JOURNEY MADE BY BILBO BAGGINS OF  
HOBBITON COMPILED FROM HIS  
MEMOIRS BY J R R TOLKIEN AND  
PUBLISHED BY GEORGE ALLEN AND  
UNWIN LTD.” (Tolkien, Annotated Hobbit, 378)***

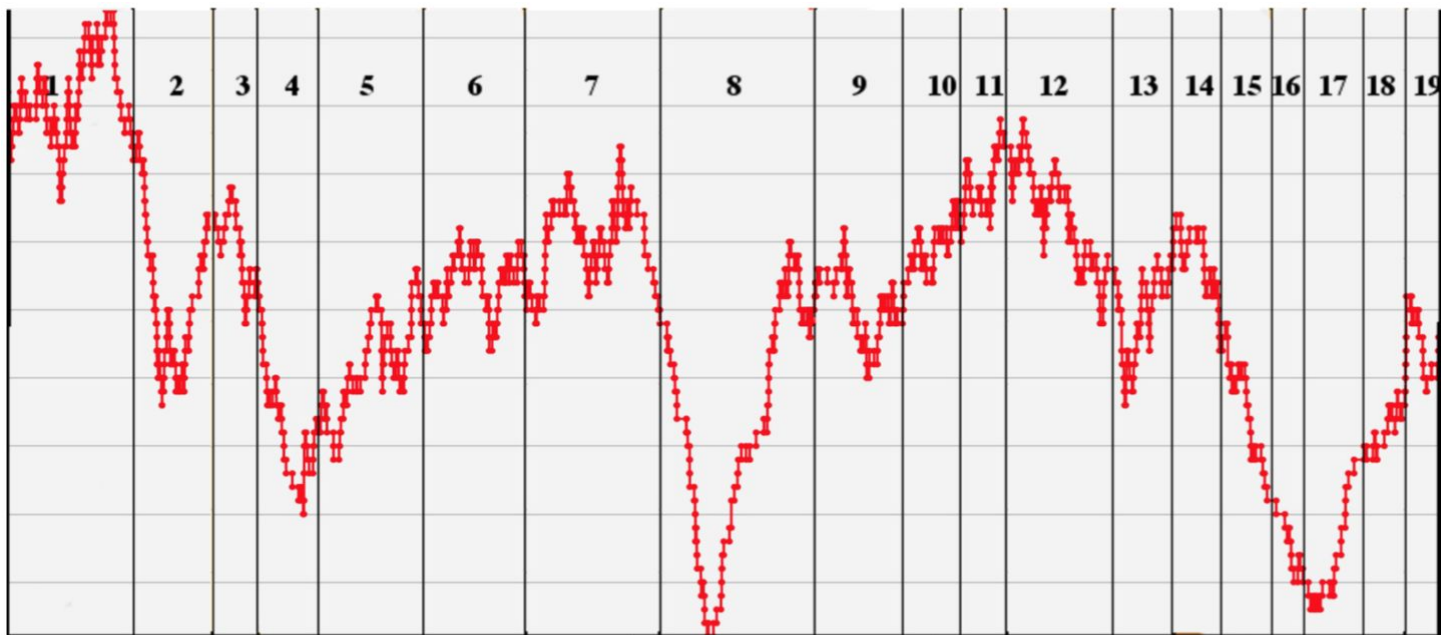


## The Frame Narrative

*“I am a philologist,... ‘language’ is the most important, for the story has to be told, and the dialogue conducted in a language; but English cannot have been the language of any people at that time. What I have, in fact done, is to equate the Westron or wide-spread Common Speech of the Third Age with English; and translate everything, including names such as The Shire, that was in the Westron into English terms, with some differentiation of style to represent dialectal differences. (Tolkien, Letters, Kindle Locations 3695-3702).*

**These hyphenated words are not used randomly - they are not distributed evenly.**

# Subtle Seeds

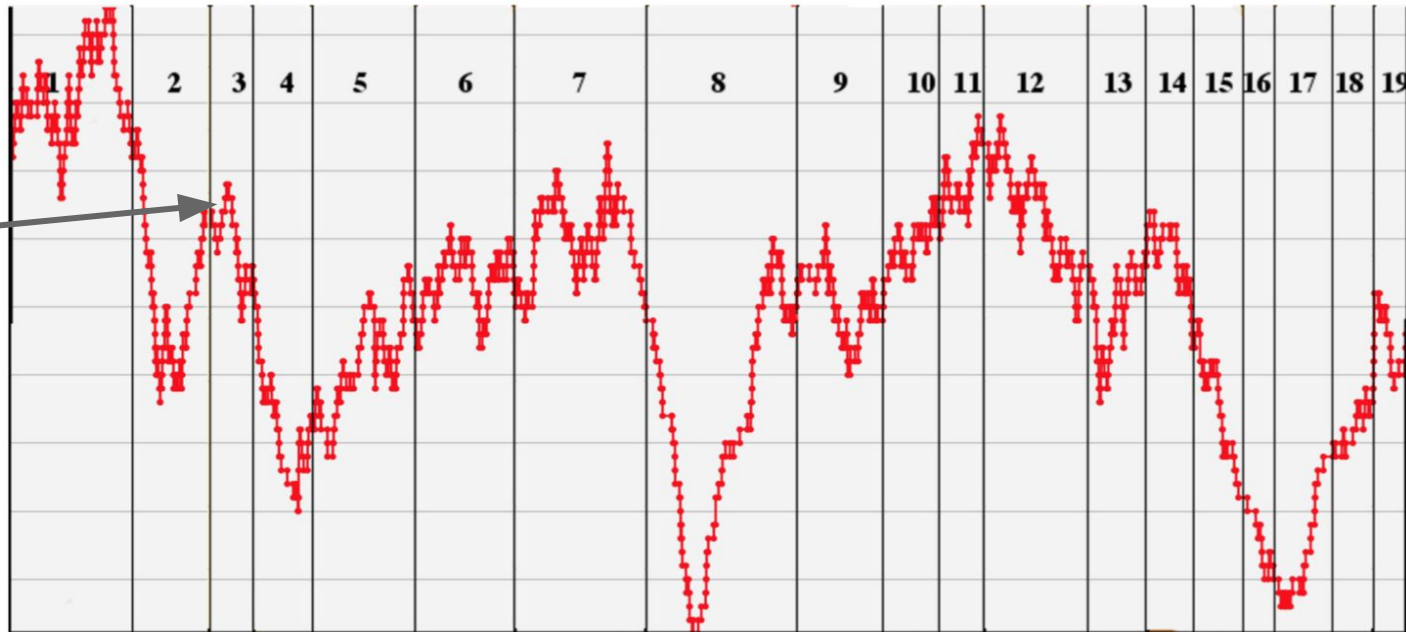


*‘Swords in these parts are mostly blunt, and axes are used for trees, and shields as cradles or dish-covers; and dragons are comfortably far-off (and therefore legendary). That is why I settled on burglary – especially when I remembered the existence of a Side-door. And here is our little Bilbo Baggins, the burglar, the chosen and selected burglar. So now let’s get on and make some plans.’*

*‘Very well then,’ said Thorin, ‘supposing the burglar-expert gives us some ideas or suggestions.’ He turned with mock-politeness to Bilbo. [01.116 -- 01.117]*

# Subtle Seeds

Are these words used in an unremarkable way? No.



*Elf-friend;  
elf-lord;  
story-telling;  
troll-make;  
Goblin-wars;  
Goblin-cleaver;  
Foe-hammer*

## Subtle Seeds

*“At rare moments we pause to wonder why a line or couplet produces an effect beyond its significance; we call it the ‘authentic magic’ of the poet, or some such meaningless expression. So little do we ponder **word-form** and sound-music, beyond a few hasty observations of its crudest manifestations in rhyme and alliteration, that we are unaware often that the answer is simply that by luck or skill the poet has struck out an air which illuminates the line like a sound of music half-attended to may deepen the significance of some unrelated thing thought or read, while the music ran.” (Tolkien, Letters, Kindle Locations 1341-1345).*

# **Sublexical Morphemes**

## **The Frame Narrative**





## **The Frame Narrative**

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*Thanks for joining me on the adventure!*

**WordsThatYouWereSaying.blog**