

(Q) A Tale of Kieu-plets (1/2) [10 Points]

The Tale of Kieu is an epic poem written in Vietnamese by author *Nguyễn Du* in 1820, which details the life of the talented young woman *Thúy Kiều*. The poem is composed of 1,627 couplets, or groups of two lines. Here are some couplets from *The Tale of Kieu* in no particular order:

1. Trăm năm trong cõi người ta,
Chữ tài chữ mệnh khéo là ghét nhau.
2. Đầu lòng hai á tó nga,
Thúy Kiều là chị, em là Thúy Vân.
3. Nửa năm hoi tiéng vừa quen,
Sân ngô cành biếc đã chen lá vàng.
4. Vân rǎng: Chị cũng nực cười,
Khéo dư nước mắt khóc người đời xưa.
5. Người đâu gấp gỡ làm chi,
Trăm năm biết có duyên gì hay không?

Each couplet of the *Tale* is written in the poetic meter known as *lục bát*¹, which has several rules. Even if we don't speak Vietnamese, we can still use these rules to identify whether a couplet has been corrupted. For example, here is a corrupted version of couplet #1:

- 1a. Trăm năm trong **dài** người ta,
Chữ tài chữ mệnh khéo là ghét nhau.

This couplet does not follow the rules of *lục bát* and consequently must have been corrupted. However, this is not always the case. Consider this other corruption to couplet #1:

- 1b. Trăm năm trong **cá** người ta,
Chữ tài chữ mệnh khéo là ghét nhau.

This corrupted version of couplet #1 still follows the rules of *lục bát*; we would need to know Vietnamese in order to determine that there was a mistake.

In Vietnamese, the diacritics (accent marks) á, à, ả, ạ, ã indicate five of the six Vietnamese tones (known as *sắc*, *huyền*, *hỏi*, *nặng*, and *ngã* respectively); the absence of a diacritic indicates the sixth tone, *ngang*. Importantly, the diacritics â, ā, ê, ô, ư do not represent tones; instead, they represent slight changes to the pronunciation of the vowels. Traditionally, Vietnamese tones are divided into two groups: *sharp* tones, of which there are four, and *flat* tones, of which there are two.

Q1. Which tones belong to which groups? Write your answer on the answer sheets.

1. From the Middle Chinese words *liuk-pat*, or 'six-eight'.



(Q) A Tale of Kieu-plets (2/2)

While searching in your local library for linguistics papers, you find six more couplets from *The Tale of Kieu*. However, some have been damaged. Only two of them have remained uncorrupted—the other four have had **exactly two words changed or removed** so that they no longer follow the rules of *lục bát*. Fortunately, even if you don't know Vietnamese, you can use the rules of *lục bát* to determine which couplets are original.

6. Vâng trình hội chùa xem tường,
Mà sao trong số đoạn sân có tên.
7. Âu đành quả tôn nhân duyên,
Cùng người một hội, một thuyền đâu ngái!
8. Thưa rắng: Chút phận ngây thơ,
Dưỡng sinh đôi tiên tóc tơ chưa đèn
9. Ngoài song thỏ thẻ oanh vàng,
Nách tường bông liễu bay ngang trước mành.
10. Chàng Kim từ lại thư song,
Nỗi nàng canh cánh bên lòng biếng khuây.
11. Mành Tương phất phất gió truyền,
Hương gây mùi nhớ, trà khan giọng.

- Q2.** Determine which two couplets are authentic and which four have been corrupted. For each couplet, circle “corrupted” or “authentic”. For each corrupted couplet, write the two words which have been corrupted, or write REMOVED if a word has been removed.

Here is one more couplet from *The Tale of Kieu*. The couplet has been transmitted in damaged form: for some of the words, two choices are possible (marked in parentheses).

- Q3.** For each combination in parentheses, determine which of the two words is correct. If both of the two words could occur and still follow the rules, circle the word BOTH. Write your answers on the answer sheets.

12. Nhẫn (ở/tù) (quán/rạp) (khách/tươi) lân (la/khác),
Tuần trăng thám thoát nay (đà/ách) thèm hai.

- Q4.** Explain your observations about the structure of *lục bát* in your answer sheets.



(Q) A Tale of Kieu-plets Answer Sheet (1/2)

(Q) A Tale of Kieu-Plets

Q1. sharp tones

flat tones

Q2 6. corrupted / authentic

Corrupted words: #1 _____ #2 _____

7. corrupted / authentic

Corrupted words: #1 _____ #2 _____

8. corrupted / authentic

Corrupted words: #1 _____ #2 _____

9. corrupted / authentic

Corrupted words: #1 _____ #2 _____

10. corrupted / authentic

Corrupted words: #1 _____ #2 _____

11. corrupted / authentic

Corrupted words: #1 _____ #2 _____

Q3 a. ó tù BOTH

b. quán rap BOTH

c. khách tươi BOTH

d. la khác BOTH

e. đà ách BOTH



(Q) A Tale of Kieu-plets Answer Sheet (2/2)

Q4

