

Round 1 2013

4s The Shavian Alphabet (10 marks)

The author G.B. Shaw (author of *Pygmalion*, which became the musical *My Fair Lady*) saw the use of the Latin (or Roman) alphabet for English as a waste of time – the alphabet simply was not suited to write English. He left money in his will to the inventor of a new (and better) script for English. Kingsley Read, among many others, entered the competition, and his alphabet was chosen in 1958 as the best response to Shaw’s challenge. Read named his invention the “Shavian Alphabet” in honor of Shaw. Here are some of the rules of Shavian:

- The majority of its characters simply represent an individual English sound. However, a few can be used as abbreviations for a whole word.
- The spelling is based on an English accent in which all the ‘r’ symbols are pronounced (such as West-country accents where the word “farmer” is pronounced with two ‘r’ sounds).
- Each letter has just one shape, rather than one for capitals and another for small (otherwise called ‘upper-case’ and ‘lower-case’ letters).

The table below contains some English phrases and their appearance in Shavian, but not in the same order.

Shavian alphabet		Roman alphabet	
1	Ɑ ⱮⱰ ⱮⱮⱮⱰ	A	this is Shavian
2	ⱮⱮ ⱮⱮⱰ ⱮⱮⱰ	B	the cat slept
3	Ɱ ⱮⱰ	C	to learn
4	ⱮⱮ ⱮⱮ ⱮⱮⱰ	D	we have cats
5	Ɱ ⱮⱰ	E	for ever

Questions

4s.1. Match the Roman transliterations above with the Shavian phrases.

4s.2. Write the following words or phrases in Shavian. For clarity, please enter one character per cell, and leave a cell blank for a space between words.

- Eve
- Ian
- turn left to sit
- sleep for Steve

4s.3. You may have noticed that Shavian has characters that are like the Roman alphabet’s ascenders (letters that stick out in an upwards direction from the line of writing such as “f” and “h”) and descenders (letters that go below the line of writing such as “g”). Ascenders are known in Shavian as ‘tall characters’ and descenders as ‘deep characters’. Some tall and deep characters make deliberate pairs, such as the following:

	tall	deep
1	ſ	ʒ
2	J	f

Assuming that the same pattern applies to other letters, what do you think is the Shavian symbol for our letter 'b'?

4s Shavian [10 marks] (answer sheet)

4s.1.	1	2	3	4	5
4s.2.a.					
b.					
c. (cont)					
d.					
4s.3.					

4s Shavian [10 marks] (solutions and marking)

38 points:

- 4s.1: 1 point for each pairing.
- 4s.2: 1 point per character.
 - Ignore minor mis-shapes, missing spaces and mis-ordering due to omitted characters (e.g. ‘.’ for capital letter).
 - Otherwise require strictly correct order based on spelling.
- 4s.3: 6 points, ignore extra information even if wrong (e.g. ‘tall’).
- No half points.

4s.1.	1		2		3		4		5			
	B		D		E		A		C			
4s.2.a.	.	h	f									
b.	.	r	\									
c. (cont)	1	o	\		c	l	J	1		1		s
	i	1										
d.	s	c	h	l		J		.	s	1	h	f
4s.3.	l											

Comment: NB last character in 4s.2c, first row, was wrongly shown as ‘@’; now corrected to ‘s’.

Comment

For Shavian, the big clue is the number of words, because Shavian uses the conventional word space. The two 2-word examples are 3 and 5, where there's a single letter for a very short word (to or for). One of those letters ('1') is also found at the end of one of the longer examples (example 1), so it must be t (as in to, slept). That's confirmed by the fact that 'C' is at the start of learn and in the second position of slept. Once you've identified two letters in three examples, you're away and the rest fall into place.