

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2019

Round 2



Problem 2. Two Róngs Don't Make a Right (10 marks)

According to legend, the *Lepcha* script was devised in the 13th century by Prince Chakdor Namgyal of Tibet. Today, it is still used to write the *Róng* (‘融’) language, which is spoken by around 50,000 people in Sikkim, India. *Róng* is distantly related to Tibetan, Burmese, and Chinese.

Below are some words (1-18) written in Lepcha script, followed by their transcriptions and meanings (A-R) in a different order. Note that ó and ú are distinct vowels from o and u.

1	ଓঁ	6	ঁ	11	ঁ	16	ঁ
2	ঁ	7	ঁ	12	ঁ	17	ঁ
3	ও	8	ও	13	ও	18	ও
4	ঁ	9	ঁ	14	ঁ		
5	ও	10	ও	15	ও		

A	bakto	'grain'	J	lali	'a kind of laurel tree'
B	bi	'vegetable'	K	món	'pig'
C	bik	'cow'	L	radi	'blanket'
D	chik	'to weigh'	M	thúk	'season'
E	chung	'little'	N	tsung kóng	'a kind of sorghum'
F	dú	'umbrella'	O	tsúk	'to bite'
G	ka	'overseer'	P	ut	'pig'
H	kajú	'dog'	Q	úng	'water'
I	khek	'freeze'	R	út	'otter'

Q.2.1. Determine the correct correspondences between 1-18 and A-R.

Q.2.2. Write in Lepcha: *chóng* ‘hand’, *jik* ‘native land’, *thikúng* ‘great-grandfather’.

Q.2.3. Transcribe the following *Róng* words: ༁ ‘to crack’, ༁ ‘to read’, ༁ ‘elephant’.

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Solution and marking.

Scoring (max 30)

- Q.2.1: 1 point for each correct letter (max 18)
 - Q.2.2: 2 points for each correct Lepcha word; 1 point with one error (max 6)
 - Q.2.3: 2 points for each correct transliteration; 1 with one error (max 6)

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Commentary

1. Writing direction is left to right.
2. The writing system is of a type called ‘abjad’, in which the main characters stand only for consonants, and vowels are either not shown at all or are shown by extra marks (‘diacritics’).
3. Syllable-initial consonants are written with full letters:

ፋ k-, የ kh-, ጽ ch-, ስ t-, ኃ th-, ታ d-, ዓ b-, ጽ ts-, ጽ r-, ዘ l-

If there is no initial consonant, the null initial ሰ is used instead.

4. Vowels are marked by symbols to the left of, below, or to the right of consonants:

ፋ ke, ያ ki, ዕ ko, ዕ kó, ዕ ku, ዕ kú

If there is no vowel mark, by default the vowel *a* is used: ዋ ka.

5. Syllable-final consonants are written with symbols above or to the left of the consonant-vowel block:

ጀ kak, ዕ kan, ዕ kat, ዕ kang

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From <http://www.ancientscripts.com/lepcha.html>:

Basic letters with vowel = /a/:

କ	ଖ	ଗ	ନ	ଚ	ଛ	ଝ	ଙ
ka	kha	ga	na	ca	cha	ja	ñna
ତ	ଥ	ଦ	ନ	ପ	ଫ	ବ	ମ
ta	tha	da	na	pa	pha	ba	ma
ତ୍ସ	ତ୍ଶା	ତ୍ସା	ଯ	ଲ	ର	ବା	
tsa	tsha	za	ya	la	ra	va	
ଶ	ଶ	ଷ	ହ				
śa	sa	wa	ha	a			

Other vowels:

ା	ା	ି	ି	୦	୦	ୁ	ୁ	େ
â	ā	i	ī	o	ō	u	ū	e
ନା	ନା	ନି	ନି	ନୋ	ନୋ	ନୁ	ନୁ	ନେ
nā	nā	ni	nī	no	nō	nu	nū	ne

Final consonants:

କକ	କମ	କଳ	କନ	କପ	କର	କତ	କାନ୍ ¹	କାନ୍ ²
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Consonant clusters are also possible, but not relevant to this problem.