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The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2021

Round 1



Problem 4. Ditema tsa Dinoko (10 marks)

The Ditema tsa Dinoko writing system is a recent invention used to transcribe several Bantu languages of southern Africa. The writing system was designed to reflect the southern African mural art form known as Ditema or Litema, which is made up of decorative geometric patterns.

Below are some representations of words in the Sesotho language (spoken mainly in Lesotho) in the Ditema tsa Dinoko script, along with their equivalents in Roman script and their English meanings (which are not relevant to the problem).

	lebitso (name)
	maseru (Maseru, capital of Lesotho)
	ngoana (child)
	toeba (mouse)
	pikitla (to rub)
	lintoa (wars)



(The tasks for Problem 4 are on the following page.)

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Q4.1. Convert the following Ditema tsa Dinoko words into Roman script:

Q4.2. Which of the following examples represents the words “Ditema tsa Dinoko” in Ditema tsa Dinoko? Put 'X' in the first column to show which is the correct one.

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Solution and marking.

Scoring: (max 12)

- **4.1:** 1 point for each correct element (separated by +). Max 10.
- **4.2:** 2 points for the correct choice. Max 2

Q4.1.

	ka+mo+ra+o (back/rear)
	i+po+tsa (wonder)
	u+tlo+a (hear)

Q4.2.

x	

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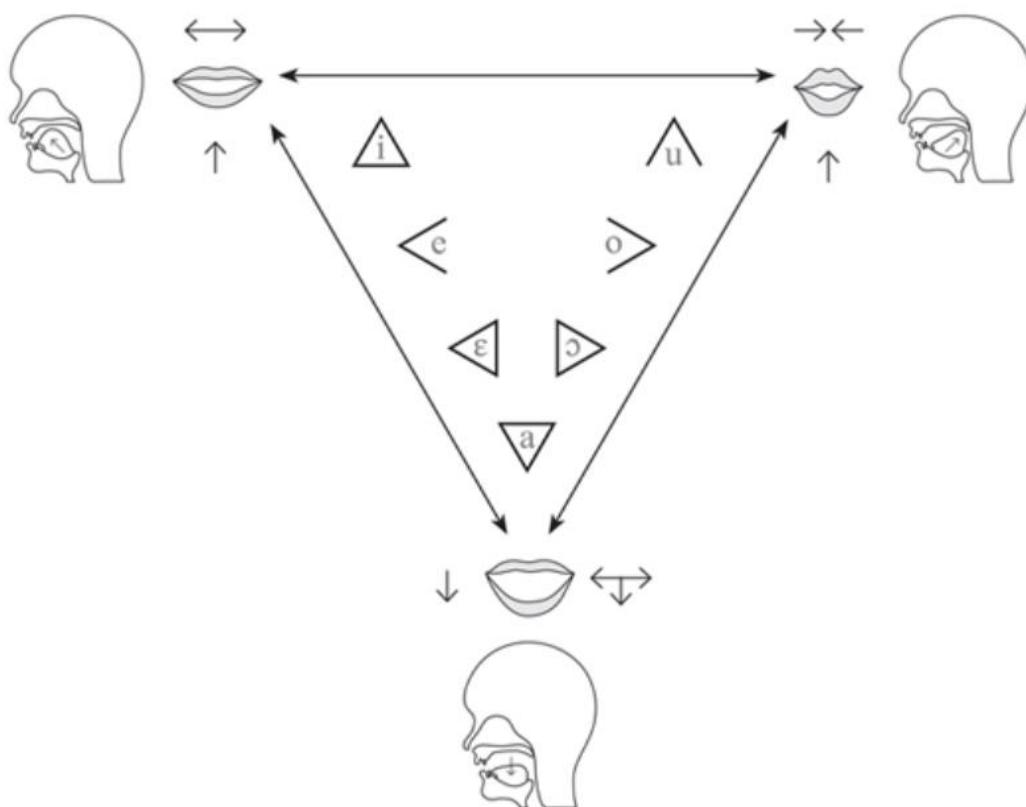
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Commentary

The vowel nucleus of a syllable forms the basic “shape” of a Ditema tsa Dinoko symbol, and the consonant markings rotate to match the orientation of the vowel shape. The letter shapes reflect the phonetic classification of the sounds concerned and (according to Wikipedia) can be displayed in the familiar vowel triangle and consonant chart.

Vowels



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Consonants

CONSONANTS	bilabial	labio-dental	dental	alveolar	post-alveolar	retroflex	palatal	velar	glottal	lateral (dental or alveolar)
plosive	p ^h		t ^h	t ^h			c ^h	k ^h		
fricative	φ	f		s	ʃ	ʂ		x	h	ɬ
approximant	w						j			l / ɭ
trill				r/R						
tap or flap						ɽ				
click			ǀ	ǃ						ǁ
nasals	m		ɱ	n			ɲ	ŋ		