

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2019

Round 2



Problem 2. Two Róng 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* (𑌪𑌃) 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	𑌪𑌃𑌪	6	𑌪𑌃	11	𑌪	16	𑌪𑌃𑌪
2	𑌪𑌃	7	𑌪𑌃	12	𑌪	17	𑌪𑌃
3	𑌪𑌃	8	𑌪𑌃𑌪	13	𑌪𑌃	18	𑌪𑌃
4	𑌪𑌃	9	𑌪𑌃	14	𑌪𑌃		
5	𑌪𑌃	10	𑌪𑌃	15	𑌪𑌃		

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

Q.2.1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	J	F	A	Q	C	R	D	N	H	M	G	I	B	O	K	L	E	P
Q.2.2	chóng 'hand'																	
	jik 'native land'																	
	thikúng 'great-grandfather'						 (thi-kung) or  (thik-ung)											
Q.2.3	 'to crack'						dan											
	 'to read'						rok											
	 'elephant'						ranmo											

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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:

𐌀 *k*-, 𐌁 *kh*-, 𐌂 *ch*-, 𐌃 *t*-, 𐌄 *th*-, 𐌅 *d*-, 𐌆 *b*-, 𐌇 *ts*-, 𐌈 *r*-, 𐌉 *l*-

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

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

𐌀𐌁 *ke*, 𐌀𐌁𐌃 *ki*, 𐌀𐌁𐌆 *ko*, 𐌀𐌁𐌇 *kó*, 𐌀𐌁𐌈 *ku*, 𐌀𐌁𐌉 *kú*

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

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

𐌀𐌁𐌃𐌃 *kak*, 𐌀𐌁𐌃𐌄 *kan*, 𐌀𐌁𐌃𐌅 *kat*, 𐌀𐌁𐌃𐌆 *kang*

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

Basic letters with vowel = /a/:



Other vowels:



Final consonants:



Consonant clusters are also possible, but not relevant to this problem.