

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2021

Round 1



Problem 3. Waama (10 marks)

Waama, also called Yoabu, is spoken by about 120,000 people in Benin, in West Africa. It has its own writing system which uses the Roman alphabet.

The table below shows fifteen Waama sentences (1-15) and their English translations (A-O) in a different order.



Waama		English	
1	Cando kpento kpi, o ñ faa o suka.	A	<i>The tree fell in the forest.</i>
2	Tando dori.	B	<i>A car passed by earlier.</i>
3	N pe saaki ti yete.	C	<i>I went to my friend's house.</i>
4	Bika kɔɔsi kɔɔka.	D	<i>The child fell.</i>
5	Soosada kaate.	E	<i>Marie lost the money, but she found it.</i>
6	Suka kpi.	F	<i>It rained.</i>
7	Ba kaate tiibu band.	G	<i>My hen went to Yoto's house.</i>
8	N yeentire n daaso.	H	<i>My wife swept our house.</i>
9	Bisu yɔkɔɔti.	I	<i>The children had fun.</i>
10	Tiibu dori puɲa mii.	J	<i>Tchando's father died, and he inherited his car.</i>
11	N taka n daaso yete.	K	<i>They gathered under the tree.</i>
12	Maari dikitifa pei, o ñ fa piisi.	L	<i>I hurt my friend.</i>
13	Suka miiki pɔmpɔmma.	M	<i>The soldiers assembled.</i>
14	Bika dori.	N	<i>The car broke down.</i>
15	N kɔɔka taka Yoto yete.	O	<i>The child sold the hen.</i>

Q3. Write A-O in the bottom row below to show which English sentences translate the Waama sentences 1-15.

[illegible]

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2021

Round 1



Solution and marking.

Scoring: (max 15)

- 1 point for each correct letter. (max 15)

Waama	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
English	J	F	H	O	M	N	K	L	I	A	C	E	B	D	G

Commentary

1. There is no possessive marker. The structures *Tchando house* and *friend house* work similarly to phrases like *garage door* in English.
2. Word order is SVO except with object pronouns.
3. In compound sentences, the coordinating conjunction follows the subject NP.
4. The word *h* can mean either *and* or *but* depending on the context.
5. Definiteness is not marked by means of definite or indefinite articles. Definiteness is determined by context.
6. Instead of prepositions, the language has postpositions (tree under, forest in).
7. Lexical observations: *take* means 'go to'; *miiki* means 'pass by'; *kpi* means 'die' in the larger sense of 'come to an end'; *ɣɔkɔti* means 'have fun' as well as 'play'.
8. The nouns in this problem become plural as follows: *bika*(sg) – *bisu*(pl).
9. The third person personal and possessive pronoun *o* is not gender marked (*o* = he/she, his/her).