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 e___ ___3th century by Prince Chakdor Namgyal of Tibet. Today, it is still used to write the *Róng* (☷) 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	ᰰᰱᰰ	6	ᰵᰬ	11	ᰬ	16	ᰛᰬᰱ		
2	ᰵᰬ	7	ᰵᰳ	12	ᰱ	17	ᰭᰬ		
3	ᰵᰬᰱ	8	ᰵᰬᰱ	13	ᰵᰬ	18	ᰵᰬ		
4	ᰭᰬ	9	ᰬᰵᰬ	14	ᰵᰬ				
5	ᰵᰬ	10	ᰵᰬ	15	ᰬ				

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)

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:

   k-, *kh-,* *ch-,* *t-,* *th-,* *d-,* *b-,* *ts-,* *r-,* *l-*

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

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

   ke, *ki,* *ko,* *kó,* *ku,* *kú*

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

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

   kak, *kan,* *kat,* *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.