

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2019

Round 2



Problem 5. Witsuwit'en (10 marks)

There are many First Nations peoples living in British Columbia, Canada's westernmost province. Land is critically important to these peoples' cultures and ways of life – in one language of the Wet'suwet'en people, the word for First Nations person is “Yənqadəni?”, which literally translates to “man of the land”. The languages of these First Nations peoples reflect the complex interactions of land with other natural elements like water, plants (including the broadleaf plantain, *Plantago major*, whose leaves provide shelter for many small reptiles and amphibians), and animals (including wolves, bats, ducks, frogs of varying sizes and colours).

In early 2019, First Nations communities in British Columbia made international headlines when energy corporation Coastal GasLink began constructing a natural gas pipeline through Wet'suwet'en territory. The project threatened Wet'suwet'en land, waters, plants, and animals, so the community organised a non-violent resistance campaign. In response, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police intervened and arrested or forcibly removed dozens of demonstrators. The project continued until two arrowheads were uncovered in the pipeline's path, and Coastal GasLink agreed to halt construction to preserve Wet'suwet'en artefacts.

Yet even before the arrowheads were found, the pipeline project already threatened the most valuable Wet'suwet'en “artefacts” – their culture and their languages. Witsuwit'en, an Athabaskan language with about 130 speakers, is one of several languages spoken by Wet'suwet'en people.

On the next page are some words and phrases in Witsuwit'en and their English translations. Your task is to work out how the words' forms interrelate their meanings.

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Witsuwit'en	English
1. bət	A. abdomen, belly
2. bətdeχ	B. bat (animal)
3. dəlkʷ'ax	C. blanket
4. dəlkʷ'axbət	D. broadleaf plantain
5. dəlkʷ'axdət'ay	E. dog harness
6. dəlkʷ'axneɪdəc	F. duck
7. dət'ay	G. duck feather
8. dət'ay cəs	H. frog
9. təctl'ol	I. light blue
10. təcyəs	J. my rope
11. neɪdəc	K. snow
12. sətl'ol	L. snowflake
13. yəs	M. upper part of stomach
14. yəscəs	N. wolf

Q.5.1. Match the Witsuwit'en forms 1-14 with their English translation A-N.

Q.5.2. Translate the following into English: təc, cəs, deχ

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Solution and marking.

Scoring (max 17)

- 5.1: 1 point for each correct letter (max 14)
 - 5.2: 1 point for each correct translation (max 3)

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Commentary

The challenge in this problem is to see semantic connections between the English translations which might motivate formal similarities in the Witsuwit'en. These connections are hinted at in the literal meanings in the middle column.

Witsuwit'en	literal meaning	English
1. bət	belly	A. abdomen, belly
5. dəlkʷ'ax + dət'ay	frog + duck	B. bat (animal)
11. nełdəc	blanket	C. blanket
6. dəlkʷ'ax + nełdəc	frog + blanket	D. broad leaf plantain
9. təc + tl'ol	dog + rope	E. dog harness
7. dət'ay	duck	F. duck
8. dət'ay cəs	duck + feather	G. duck feather
3. dəlkʷ'ax	frog	H. frog
4. dəlkʷ'ax + bət	frog + belly	I. light blue
12. tl'ot	rope	J. rope
13. yəs	snow	K. snow
14. yəs + cəs	snow + feather	L. snowflake
2. bətdex	belly + top	M. upper part of stomach
10. təc + yəs	dog + snow	N. wolf