



# International Linguistics Challenge

Qualification Round

*2025 Edition*

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Sri Lanka

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# Problem A: Phonetic Transcription

## Examples

i. [Audio 000a](#) – ‘small’

mika

ii. [Audio 000b](#) – ‘stone’

ston

## Solution

I used my native language, Tamil, to phonetically transcribe the audio files and then transliterated the transcription into English for further use.

I included the transliteration I was able to find, together with the IPA notations.

1. [Audio 001](#) – ‘to sing’ - shinu

ʃinu

2. [Audio 002](#) – ‘river’ - nara

nara

3. [Audio 003](#) – ‘to carry’ - fluchon

flu:tʃon

4. [Audio 004](#) – ‘long’ - funch

funtʃ

5. [Audio 005](#) – ‘tree’ - thile

θile

6. [Audio 006](#) – ‘cold’ - gelum

gelum

7. [Audio 007](#) – ‘to sleep’ - burak

bʊrək

8. [Audio 008](#) – ‘house’ - resso

resso

9. [Audio 009](#) – ‘to break’ - ravik

rəvɪk

10. [Audio 010](#) – ‘bright’ - lassou

ləssəu

## Problem B: Word Boundaries

### Examples

#### iii. Audio 000c

mikachonregik - mik a chon regik

mika  $\widehat{tʃon}$  regik

small stone roll

‘The small stone rolls.’

### Solution

The transcribed full sentences are as follows, clearly shown with word boundaries.

#### 1. Audio 011

funchnaramikagelumchonfluchon - funch nara mik a gelum chon fluchon

$\widehat{funtʃ}$  nara mik a gelum  $\widehat{tʃon}$   $\widehat{flu:tʃon}$

long river small cold stone to carry

‘The long river carries the small cold stone.’

#### 2. Audio 012

mikalassoukosapshinu - mik a lassou kosap shinu

mika  $\widehat{ləsəʊ}$  kosəp  $\widehat{ʃinu}$

small bright bird sings

‘The small bright bird sings.’

#### 3. Audio 013

gobnimuthilelorairaivravik - gobnimu thile loraiv ravik

gobnimu  $\widehat{\thetaile}$  lorəiv rəvik

tall child tree easily breaks

‘The tall child breaks the tree easily.’

## Problem C: Word Order and Plural Morphology

### Solution

The given:

14. kanabi jelu	'The women dance.'
15. kanabi telum feru	'The women see the boy.'
16. lomu telum huni	'The dog chases the boy.'
17. telumi lomu feru	'The boys see the dog.'
18. kanab kuran baraa	'The woman studies the stars.'
19. panon jelu	'The mountains dance.'
20. lomun pano feru	'The dogs see the mountain.'
21. lomun o telumi pano feru	'The dogs and the boys see the mountain.'

From these, we are able to do some basic analysis.

14 and 15 - kanabi means women.

So, 14 - jelu means dance.

15 and 16 - telum means boy.

So, 15 - feru means see.

As telum means boy, 17 - telumi could be boys.

Assuming that, 17 - lomu means dog.

16 - huni means chase.

Like boy and boys, 18 - kanab means woman.

19 - panon means mountain as we already know dance.

20 - it verifies our plural systems as lomun means dogs and pano means mountain.

So, 21 - o likely to mean and.

18 - kuran and baraa should be either of study and stars.

(a) By looking at the simple sentences 14 and 19, that comes as Subject first and Verb last.

Now considering the other examples,

15: kanabi (S) telum (O) feru (V) → "women see boy"

16: lomu (S) telum (O) huni (V) → "dog chases boy"

We can deduce that the language X uses the basic word order as Subj. – Obj. – Verb (SOV).

In sentences without an object, such as kanabi Selu ("The women dance"), the verb follows the subject (S–V), consistent with the SOV structure.

When looking at 21, which is a multiple-subject sentence, Subjects (lomun, telumi) are grouped before the object, so it is still S–O–V.

And because of this, we can be able to find kuran means stars and baraa means study.

(b) By analysis,

kanab → kanabi - woman → women

lomu → lomun - dog → dogs

telum → telumi - boy → boys

pano → panon - mountain → mountains

By looking at this, the plural formation seems to have a pattern in suffixes.

Similar to my native language, Tamil,

the living intellectual things seem to have a suffix of -i, and

non-living and non-intellectual things seem to have a suffix of -n.

(c) English sentence: “The mountains study the women and the dogs.”

Subject: the mountains → panon (plural of pano)

Objects: the women and the dogs → kanabi o lomun

[because, women → kanabi, dogs → lomun, “and” → o for conjunction (in 21)]

Verb: study → baraa (in 18)

So, translating the sentence ‘The mountains study the women and the dogs.’ gives,

**’panon kanabi o lomun baraa.’**

## Problem D: Verbal Agreement

### Solution

(a) Comparing the sentences 22–25 with the sentences in Problem C (14–21), we can observe that verbs in Language X exhibit systematic variation depending on the number of the subject and, in some cases, the object.

- 22. kanab Selu - The woman dances.
- 14. kanabi Selu - The women dance.
- 23. telumi lomun ferua - The boys see the dogs.
- 17. telumi lomu feru - The boys see the dog.
- 24. kanab kura bara - The woman studies the star.
- 18. kanab kuran baraa - The woman studies the stars.
- 25. lomu kuran hunia - The dog chases the stars.
- 16. lomu telum huni - The dog chases the boy.

- In 22 and 14, the singular and plural subjects without any objects use the bare form Selu.
- In 23, when having both a plural subject and a plural object, the verb changes to ferua to reflect this plural agreement, while in 17, when having a plural subject and a singular object, the verb uses the bare form feru.
- In 24, the singular subject and the singular object use the bare form bara, while in 18, when having a singular subject and a plural object, the verb changes to baraa.
- In 25, when having a singular subject and plural object, the verb takes the form hunia, while in 16, when having a singular subject and singular object, the verb uses the bare form huni.

#### 1. Subject number agreement:

Singular or plural subjects without any objects usually take the bare verb form, without triggering a suffix. (e.g., selu(22 and 14))

#### 2. Object number agreement:

Plural objects seem to induce a suffix like -a on the verb (e.g., ferua(23), baraa(18), hunia(25)) while singular objects does not. (e.g., feru(17), bara(24), huni(16))

(c) English sentence: “The bird sees the river and the trees.”

Subject: the bird → kosap

[from audio 012, as we know the other words already.]

Objects: the river and the trees → nara o thilen

[because, river → nara, tree → thile, so trees should be thilen, “and” → o for conjunction]

Verb: sees → ferua

[because the sentence has a singular subject and a plural object, the object triggers the suffix -a.]

Plural noun formation:

The plural of the noun thile (“tree”) is formed by modifying the singular stem to thilen (“trees”). Singular nouns such as nara (“river”) remain unchanged.

Verbal agreement morphology:

The verb ferua agrees with the singular subject and the plural object. The suffix -a reflects number agreement with the plural object, consistent with the pattern observed in the previous example sentences.

Word order:

The sentence follows the SOV pattern: Subject (kosap) → Object (nara o thilen) → Verb (ferua).

So, translating the sentence gives,

**'kosap nara o thilen ferua.'**

**kosəp nara o θilen ferua:**

## Problem E: Dialectal Variation

### Solution

#### Part (a)

When looking at the examples,

26. kanabi ferua - The women see.
27. kanabi telum feru 'The women see the boy.
28. panon ferua - The mountains see.
29. lomu panon ferua - The dog sees the mountains.

Analysing the pattern gives,

- In 26 and 28, when having a plural subject without any object, the verb form changes by using a suffix. (ferua having a suffix of -a)
- In 27, when having a plural subject and a singular object, the verb uses the bare form.
- In 29, when having a singular subject and plural object, the verb takes the form ferua by triggering a suffix.

#### 1. Subject number agreement:

Plural subjects without any object usually trigger a suffix. (e.g., selu(22 and 14))

#### 2. Object number agreement:

Plural objects seem to induce a suffix like -a on the verb (e.g., ferua(29)) while singular objects does not. (e.g., feru(27))

Comparing the sentences from Dialect II in 26–29 with the sentences in Problem D,

Similarity : In both dialects, when the object is singular, they do not seem to modify the base form of the verb (huni, feru, bara)(in 16, 17, 24, 27), while plural objects causes the verbs to change. (ferua, hunia)(in 23, 25, 29)

Difference : In dialect I, subjects without objects do not induce a verb form change (in 14, 22), while in the dialect II, a plural subject, even without an object, does induce a suffix (in 26, 28).

### Part (b)

In Dialect II, when a pronominal subject is dropped, the verb still reflects the number of the omitted subject.

Therefore, the equivalent of “He/she/they dance” (31) in Dialect II would trigger a suffix with the base form if the subject is plural, or the base form itself if the subject is singular. This prediction is consistent with the Dialect II pattern that verbs primarily agree with subject number, even in pro-drop contexts.

So, it could be,

*ʃelu* or *ʃelua*

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