

Problem 1. Seri (15 marks)

Seri, or **cmiique iitom**, is a language isolate spoken by around 800 Seri people on the coast of Sonora, Mexico (pictured in red). Like in English, most nouns in Seri are accompanied by an article – a word meaning *the* or *a/an*. But articles in Seri behave quite differently to English, and they also convey information that isn't contained in their English translations.



A student learning Seri found that this extra information was contained in drawings describing the sentences. Below are twelve Seri sentences, with the student's drawings. For some sentences, an English translation is also given. These translations are not necessary for you to solve the problem, but just clarify the drawings.

1. **Cascareera cop haaho com iti mmazjij.**

The ladder cracks on the road.



2. **Cmaam quij hamazaj quij imaai.**

The woman makes the clay pot.



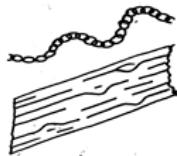
3. **Icamitc quih hast quij iti miih.**

The yarn is on the rock.



4. **Hehe com eenm-hacoaazj quih iicx moom.**

The wooden plank is near the chain.



5. **Ctam com maheemij.**

The man moves slowly.



6. **Comixaz quih intapolquim.**

The vine breaks.



7. **Caamjõ quij poosj coi iti maheemij.**



8. **Ctam coi haxz coi imfizo.**



9. **Ctam cop icaaspoj cop imaai.**



10. **Hast coi halit quij innip.**



11. **Cmaam cop hehe cop imfizo.**



12. **Ctam quij hast cop iti miij.**



Q 1.1 Below are four more pictures 13–16 drawn by the student. Replace each gap (i)–(vi) with a single word to complete the Seri sentences. Two sentences are accompanied by an English translation for clarity. *Hint:* two of your answers to (i)–(vi) should be the same word!

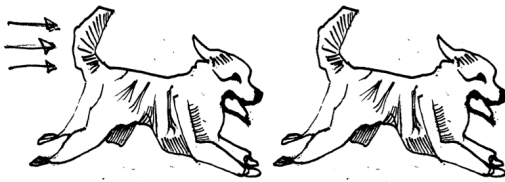
13. **Haxz** __ (i) __ **hast** __ (ii) __ **iti** __ (iii) __.
The dog is on the stone slab.



15. **Haxz** __ (v) __ **matax**.



14. **Haxz** __ (iv) __ **mojoz**.
The dogs flee.



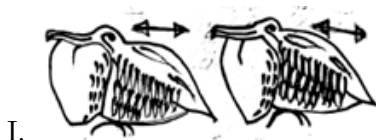
16. **Haxz** __ (vi) __ **mojoz**.



Q 1.2 Below are more Seri sentences 17–22, and some more pictures drawn by the student. Match up the Seri sentences to the pictures describing them. One sentence has two corresponding pictures, whereas the others only have one. Four of the pictures do not correspond to any sentence. You may be interested to know that the bird featured in F, G, and I is a frigatebird.

17. **Cset coi matax**.
 18. **Yahjij quih matax**.
 19. **Ctam cop hast quij innifz**.

20. **Caamjö quij halit quih iti miij**.
 21. **Icamitc quih cascareera com iti miih**.
 22. **Cset quij hehe coi innip**.



Q 1.3 Below are two more pictures 23–24 drawn by the student. The sentences are accompanied by an English translation for clarity. Give the Seri sentences corresponding to the drawings.

23. *The woman is near the pencil.*



24. *The rope hits the bush.*



[The remainder of this page is intentionally left blank.]

Problem 1. Seri Answers

1.1	(i) quij	(iii) <u>miij</u>	(v) com
	(ii) com	(iv) coi	(vi) cop

For **Q1.2** write the corresponding letter(s) under each item.

17.	18.	19.	20.	21.	22.
I	K	E	C	H	F, G

1.3	23. Cmaam cop + icaaspoj com + iicx + <u>moop</u>* .
	24. Poosj quih + hehe quij + innip.

* The correct form here is actually **miip** due to the verb root **-aap** (coming from the alternative form of the article **cap**) and the change **i-aa > ii**, but the students are not expected to be able to deduce that.

Maximum 20 pts.

Q 1.1 Max 6. For all except (iii): 1 pt per correct answer.

For (iii), the score depends on the answer to (i), whether or not it was correct [so-called “error carried forward”]. If the student’s answer to (i) is **cop**, award 1 pt for **moop**; if (i) is **com**, award 1 pt for **moom**; if (i) is **quij**, award 1 pt for **miij**; if (i) is **quih**, award 1 pt for **miih**; if (i) is any other word, or the student gave no answer for (i), award 1 pt for **miij**.

Q 1.2 Max 7. For each of 17–21, award 1 pt if correct. That is, if the correct answer is given and no incorrect answers are given. For 22, award 2 pts if correct; award 1 pt if one correct answer is given, and no incorrect answers are given.

Q 1.3 Max 7. Split each sentence into four (23) or three (24) regions, as closely as possible to the official solution. A region may be empty (contain no words). Split the sentences however allows you to award the most points.

For each region other than the final region of 23, award 1 pt if it is correct. Ignore minor spelling mistakes/copying errors in the words **cmaam**, **icaaspoj**, **poosj**, and **hehe**.

For the final region of 23, the correct answer depends on the final word of the first region of 23, whether or not that region was correct. If the final word of the first region is **cop**, award 1 pt for **moop**; if it is **com**, award 1 pt for **moom**; if it is **quij**, award 1 pt for **miij**; if it is **quih**, award 1 pt for **miih**; if it is any other word (or the first region is empty), award 1 pt for **moop**.

E.g. **cmaam quih icaspoj com miih** scores 2 pts for 23.

Problem 1. Seri Commentary

- Syntax:
 - Subject – Object/Location – Postposition – Verb
 - Noun – Article – Postposition
- Articles:
 - Nouns take an article based on their position or flexibility.
 - **cop** = upright/vertical/standing
 - **com** = flat/horizontal/lying down
 - **quij** = compact/round/sitting
 - **quih** = flexible/string-like
 - **coi** = plural

In reality, this system is far more complex: many nouns always take one article regardless of position, and **quih** is also used as a general article objects in unknown positions
- Postpositions: **iti** = *on*; **iicx** = *near*.
- The verb to be is **mVVC**, where **V** is the vowel and **C** is the final consonant of the article of the subject. This does not apply to **-aap**, which comes from the alternative form **cap** of the article **cop**, and becomes **miip** in the conjugation used in this problem.

References and further reading:

- Marlett A. *A Grammar of Seri*.
- Moser, M. B. & Stephen A. Marlett. *Comcáac quih yaza quih hant ihíp hac: Diccionario seri- español- inglés [y con gramática]*. Plaza y Valdés Editores and Universidad de Sonora; 2005.

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