



United Kingdom Linguistics Olympiad 2025

Round 1 Paper - Breakthrough Level

Welcome to UKLO, the examination of wondrous languages. Every year we give out a new challenge to students to test their language and problem-solving skills. Can you figure out how these languages work?

There are three languages to analyse for the Breakthrough competition:

- Q1: **Devanagari** – *Babette Verhoeven*
- Q2: **Fur** – *Joakim Colpier*
- Q3: **Saisiyat** – *Babette Verhoeven*

Instructions:

Please make sure you have the following materials:

- 1x Cover Sheet (this sheet); 1x Examination Paper (Questions 1 – 3);
- 1x Answer Sheet (2 pages);
- 2-3 blank sheets for rough working.

Once the examination is over, **return all sheets to your teacher**, including any sheets with your answers on. You are not permitted to remove any materials from your classroom.

Please **write your full name** on the top of every page of the Answer Sheet. If you make a mistake, put a line through your whole answer (e.g. ~~wrong answer~~).

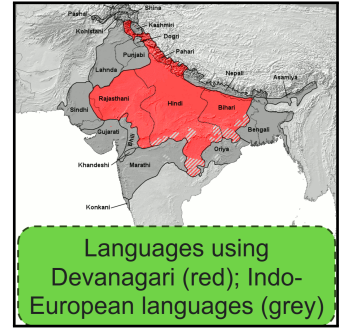
If you need more blank paper for working, it must be provided. If you need to write some of your answers on blank paper instead of the provided Answer Sheet, indicate this **clearly** on the Answer Sheet and on the sheet with your answers on.

We hope you enjoy exploring the fascinating world of language. Remember that if you don't immediately see a way into a problem, it's because you're looking in the wrong place. Keep looking at it from different angles, and you'll get there.

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Problem 1. Devanagari (5 marks)

Cricket is probably the most popular sport in India, and many people follow the Indian Premier League, the main cricket league. Here are the 10 teams' names written in the Devanagari script used to write Hindi, one of the official languages of India. It may be helpful to know that there are no capital letters in Devanagari.



1. गुजरात तैतन्स्
2. लखनऊ सुपेर् गअिन्त्स्
3. सुन्रैसेर्स् हैदराबाद
4. मुंबई इन्दयिन्स्
5. राजस्थान रोयल्स्
6. दलिली चपतिल्स्
7. चेन्नई सुपेर् कनिग्स्
8. पंजाब कनिग्स्
9. कोलकाता क्नैत् रैदेर्स्
10. रोयल् छल्लेन्गेर्स् बैंगलोर

Q 1.1 Match the Hindi team name to the correct English version. In the square brackets, you can see the actual Hindi pronunciations of several words and cities; the Devanagari spelling of words reflects the Hindi pronunciation, not the English spelling!

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. Lucknow [Lakhanoo] Super Giants | f. Rajasthan [Raajasthaan] Royals |
| b. Chennai [Chenni] Super Kings | g. Gujarat Titans [Taitans] |
| c. Punjab [Panjaab] Kings | h. Mumbai [Mumbi] Indians [Indiyans] |
| d. Kolkata [Kolakaataa] Knight [Knait] Riders [Raiders] | i. Sunrisers Hyderabad [Haidaraabaad] |
| e. Delhi [Dilli] Capitals | j. Royal Challengers Bangalore [Baingalor] |

Problem 1. Devanagari Answers

For **Q1.1** write the corresponding letter under each item.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
g	a	i	h	f	e	b	c	d	j

Maximum 10 pts.

Q 1.1 Max 10. 1 pt per correct correspondence.

Problem 1. Devanagari Commentary

Devanagari is an abugida: a script where letters represent consonants with an ‘inbuilt’ vowel, standard the short *-a-*. For writing a consonant that is followed by another vowel, you add an accent or additional symbol to indicate *-i-* or *-u-* for example.

References & Further Reading

- <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/devanagari.htm>

Problem 2. Fur (5 marks)

Fur is the language of the Fur people of Darfur, in western Sudan, and has nearly 800,000 native speakers.

Below are some sentences in Fur, along with their English translations. Note that the diacritics ´ and ` mark high and low tone respectively; ñ marks the same sound as in Spanish, similar to the *n* in *onion*. You always indicates the singular pronoun.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Kòrò jabèl. | <i>You drink the water.</i> |
| 2. Yáà tòn tuumèl. | <i>The woman builds the house.</i> |
| 3. Bàin kòrò lemèl. | <i>The elder licks the water.</i> |
| 4. Tònà jutumèl. | <i>You build the houses.</i> |
| 5. Kàrabà kòrò kelmèlà. | <i>The animals lick the water.</i> |
| 6. Tòn yáà bauèl. | <i>The house holds the woman.</i> |
| 7. Bàinà tòn kutumèlà. | <i>The elders build the house.</i> |
| 8. Yáà dèl baèl. | <i>The woman drinks the oil.</i> |
| 9. Jirgèl. | <i>You tie.</i> |

You are also told that the verb **ruñèl** means *to lift*.



Q 2.1 Translate into English:

10. **Yáà bàin ruñèl.**
11. **Kòrò jelmèl.**
12. **Yáà rigèl.**

Q 2.2 Translate into Fur:

13. *The animal ties.*
14. *The elders lift the house.*
15. *You hold the woman.*
16. *The animal licks the oil.*

Problem 2. Fur Answers

2.2	10. <i>The woman lifts the elder.</i>
	11. <i>You lick the water.</i>
	12. <i>The woman ties.</i>
2.2	13. Kàrab + rigèl.
	14. Bàinà tòn + kurñèlà.
	15. Yáà + jabuèl.
	16. Kàrab dèl + kelmèl.

Maximum 11 pts.

Q 2.1 Max 3. 1 pt for a correct translation. Allow English misspellings, as long as it is clear what is intended.

Q 2.2 Max 8. 1 pt per correct component separated by +, in the correct order. If at least part is correct but not in the correct order, award 1 pt. E.g. both **Jabuèl yáà** and **Yáà kab** score 1 pt for 15. Allow up to one extra/missing diacritic per sentence, but penalise a second. Ignore punctuation and capital letters.

Problem 2. Fur Commentary

- Word order is Subject – Object – Verb.
- Plural is marked with **-à**, both on nouns and verbs with plural subjects. (Students could believe that the suffix is **-a**, and that the final tone of any noun is low, hence the leniency in marking diacritics.)
- Verbs with 2sg or 3pl subjects receive the prefixes **j-** and **k-** respectively, and the first two sounds of the root swap places (metathesise).

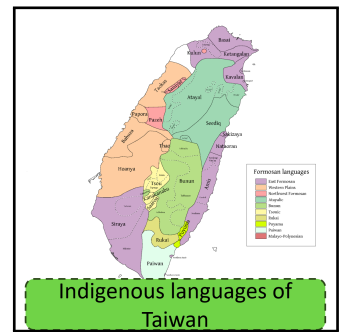
References

- Jakobi, A. (1990). *A Fur grammar: phonology, morphophonology and morphology* (N.A.). Hamburg: Buske.

Problem 3. Saisiyat (10 marks)

Saisiyat is an indigenous language spoken by the Saisiyat people in the mountainous regions of North-West Taiwan. It is spoken by just under 6,000 people. It is considered endangered as few young people use it, but in recent years with help from the Taiwanese government, there is an effort to save Saisiyat as an indigenous language.

Below are some Saisiyat sentences with possible English translations. Note that in some instances, some context about the situation affects the grammar of the Saisiyat sentence, but not the English translation. This context is given to you in [square brackets]. The two symbols ‘ and ’ represent a particular pronunciation of the vowel after or before it.



Tatini’ tomalek ka ‘aewpir.	<i>The old man cooks some sweet potato.</i>
Sia komaat ka kinaat no korkoring.	<i>He writes the child a letter.</i>
Yaba’ somatel ka kakaat no korkoring.	<i>The father sends the child a pen.</i>
Sia mobay ka kakaat ka korkoring.	<i>He gives the child a pen.</i> [It is his own child]
Yaba’ saeoe ka talor ka korkoring.	<i>The father offers the child some aubergine.</i> [It is the father’s own child]
Sia mobay ka ‘aehoe’ ka korkoring.	<i>She gives the child a dog.</i> [She physically handed them the dog]
Tatini’ mobay ka ‘aewpir no ‘aehoe’.	<i>The old man gives the dog some sweet potato.</i> [The old man doesn’t like the dog]
Sia mobay ka kakaat hisia.	<i>She gives him a pen.</i> [She is his sister]
‘Oya’ pasibaeah ka kakaat ‘inisia.	<i>The mother lends him a pen.</i> [He is far away]

Q 3.1 Translate the following sentences into Saisiyat, taking the context into account if it is given.

- The child writes mother a letter.*
- The father gives him some aubergine.*
[The father is angry with him]
- She gives him some sweet potato.*
[She is not angry with him]
- The child offers the old man some sweet potato.*
[The old man is away in hospital, and the child sends some sweet potato into hospital for him]

[This problem continues on the next page.]

Here are some more Saisiyat words:

rayhil	=	<i>money</i>	amilika	=	<i>foreigner</i>
kaibaaen	=	<i>clothes</i>	ayam	=	<i>pork</i>
'aehael	=	<i>sibling, brother or sister</i>			

Q 3.2 Translate the following into English. If the Saisiyat sentence conveys extra context, suggest one option of what it might be.

5. **Yaba' mobay ka rayhil 'inisia.**
6. **'Oya' pasibaeaeh ka kaibaaen no korkoring.**
7. **'Oya' pasibaeaeh ka kaibaaen ka korkoring.**

Q 3.3 Translate the following into Saisiyat, taking the context into account:

8. *The old man gives the father the money.*
[The old man does not really want to give the father any money]
9. *The mother offers the money to the child.*
[The mother is happy to give her child money]
10. *The child offers sweet potato to the sibling.*
[It is the child's own sibling]
11. *He offers pork to the foreigner.*
[He does not know the foreigner]

Problem 3. Saisiyat Answers

3.1	1. Korkoring komaat + ka kinaat + no ‘oya’.
	2. Yaba’ mobay + ka talor + ‘inisia.
	3. Sia mobay + ka ‘aewpir + hisia.
	4. Korkoring saeoe + ka ‘aewpir + no tatini’.
3.2	5. <i>The father gives money to him.</i> [e.g. He is far away, the father doesn’t like him]
	6. <i>The mother lends the child (the/some) clothes.</i> [e.g. not her child, she is angry with the child, the child is far away]
	7. <i>The mother lends the child (the/some) clothes.</i> [e.g. it is her child, the child is close by]
3.3	8. Tatini’ mobay + ka rayhil + no yaba’.
	9. ‘Oya’ saeoe + ka rayhil + ka korkoring.
	10. Korkoring saeoe + ka ‘aewpir + ka ‘aehael.
	11. Sia saeoe + ka ayam + no amilika.

Maximum 33 pts.

Q 3.1 Max 12. 1 pt per component separated by a +, in the correct order. Do not distinguish between ‘ and ’. Allow minor misspellings, e.g. **komat** for **komaat**. Do not require capital letters.

Q 3.2 Max 9. 3 pt if correct translation and a valid context. Award 1 pt if either just the translation is correct, or the context is valid.

A context is valid for 5 and 6 if it conveys a sense of distance, either physical or emotional. It is valid for 7 if it conveys a sense of closeness, either physical or emotional.

Q 3.3 Max 12. 1 pt per component separated by a + in the correct order. Do not distinguish between ‘ and ’. Allow minor misspellings, e.g. **tatini** for **tatini’**. Do not require capital letters.

Problem 3. Saisiyat Commentary

- Word order: Agent - Verb - (**ka**) Direct Object - (**ka/no**) Indirect Object
- **ka sia** > **hisia**, **no sia** > **'inisia**
- **no** is used to indicate either physical or emotional distance between the agent and the indirect object; **ka** is used otherwise.

In Saisiyat, case is marked with prefixes. In this case, the accusative case is marked with **ka** before the noun, as in **ka korkoring** and the dative case with **no**, as in **no korkoring**.

When a verb is ditransitive, such as the English verb *give*, it takes two nouns or noun phrases as objects: we tend to refer to these as direct object and indirect object.

For example:

Ali gives the child a book – here *the child* is the receiver (indirect object) and *a book* is the thing being given (direct object). In many languages, such as Saisiyat, these different roles can be indicated with different cases: the accusative case for direct objects (marked with **ka** in Saisiyat) and the dative case for indirect objects (marked with **no** in Saisiyat).

Unlike English, which has only a few ditransitive verbs, Saisiyat has more verbs that can be used in a ditransitive construction with two nouns / noun phrases, such as *offer* (**saeoe**).

There is also a twist in Saisiyat when it comes to using dative case for indirect objects, as you can also use the accusative case for indirect objects in situations where the indirect object is close either physically or emotionally. As in the example sentence: **Sia mobay ka kakaat ka korkoring** (*He gives the child a pen*), where **ka** is used for both **kakaat** (*pen*) and **korkoring** (*child*). Here, the child is close by, so **ka** is used.

But where there is a distance (either physical or emotional), the **no** (dative) prefix is used:

- **Sia komaat ka kinaat no korkoring.** – *He writes the child a letter* – pragmatically, you write letters to people who are not in the same place, so the dative **no** is used.
- **Yaba' mobay ka talor no korkoring.** – *Father gives the child an eggplant*, as in sentence 3, where father is angry with the child suggesting an emotional distance between him and the child, so that the dative **no** is used.
- Similarly, you would use the **ka** accusative prefix with sibling, but the **no** prefix with *foreigner* as in sentences 11 and 12, because normally there is a sense of closeness between siblings (they are family), which is missing from the situation with a foreigner.

The problem has kept the Saisiyat grammar deliberately simple as the use of case forms is also affected by the focus of the verb, which has been ignored here.

References

- Hsieh, F. & Huang, S. (2006). *The Pragmatics of Case Marking in Saisiyat*. *Oceanic Linguistics*, 45(1), 91-109.
- Tsai, P. S. (2003). *The Structure of Spatial Expressions in Saisiyat*. *Language, Information and Computation: Proceedings of the 17th Pacific Asia Conference*, 1-3 October, 2003, Sentosa, Singapore (pp. 339-350). Waseda University.