

Q17. The Gangga's All Here – Solution

Solution:

The main symbols are all consonants, apart from the | which indicates a vowel sound. The markers above and below indicate which vowel sound comes after the consonant. A . below the consonant sound indicates that there is no vowel sound after it, and no extra mark indicates that the vowel sound is either an *a* or an *ě*.

(1) *e* and *i* (an open circle above the consonant), and *o* and *u* (a *v* mark underneath the consonant). Technically, *a* and *ě* are also marked in the same way – without a vowel marking at all!

(2) *orangutan*, *imam*, *Russia*, *professor*.

(3)

a |^o ∞_v ≡_.

b 4_v o_v o_.

c o_. |^o ≡_v | 4_v

Strategy:

With a “writing system” problem, the first two things to determine are usually (a) what sort of writing system it is (i.e. what do the basic symbols indicate), (b) in which direction the writing goes (many languages have writing that runs right-to-left rather than left-to-right).

Here, matching the English transliterations to the Gangga Malayu symbols suggests that the “basic” Gangga Malayu symbols, the ones in

the centre of each “block”, indicate consonants. The small markings above or below the central symbols are therefore likely to indicate the vowels. This system is more or less an *abugida* writing system (one where the consonant symbols are central and the vowels following the consonants in speech are indicated by small alterations to the basic consonant symbol – most Indian writing systems follow this pattern).

It is fairly easy to determine that the writing here runs left-to-right: *sěnam*, *senamaki* and *sangka* all begin with the same basic symbol. The fact that all words ending in a consonant, then, have a symbol with a shaded dot underneath suggests that this dot indicates a bare consonant with no vowel following.

And yet when the basic symbol has *no* additions above or beneath, it *is* followed by a vowel (a or ě). Is this unusual? Not at all.

Elsewhere, when a syllable *begins* with a vowel, the vertical-line symbol is always used. The fact that it can represent several vowels (in *epok* and *ia*) suggests that it is simply used when there is no consonant at the beginning, and that the usual markings above and below will indicate which vowel it is.

And remember again, the questions are often just as useful as the data. Here, Question 1 already alerts you to the fact that some vowels will be marked in the same way – and in fact, every vowel is marked in the same way as a different one.