

[primarily intended to prepare jan Sonja with good answers and entertaining talking points during media interviews]

What is Toki Pona? Why did you invent a language?

toki pona li mu

“Toki Pona is a human language I invented in 2001. It was my attempt to understand the meaning of life in 120 words. There are now thousands of speakers and 120-137 essential words.”

“Simplify your thoughts. Less is more.”

How many people speak Toki Pona?

How many people play the piano? Should we count beginners or only advanced speakers? The largest online communities are on Reddit (6700+ members), Facebook (5100+ members), Discord (4000+ members). These numbers rank Toki Pona as more popular than languages like Klingon or the elf languages from Lord of the Rings, but second to Esperanto.

According to one community member's estimates: (or multiple people?)

Are fluent ~100

Are advanced ~200 to 500

Are intermediate ~2k to 5k

(feel free to also write what you think so Sonja can compare the numbers)

Put your numbers here if you have another opinion:

Are fluent ~

Are advanced ~

Are intermediate ~

What is the Toki Pona community and culture like?

Mu <- accurate

Page 62 of pu commands you to go “create play, and be pona,” and the community has taken that to heart

Having fun with words being one of the main objectives, joke words like kijetesantakalu (an April Fools' Day word by Sonja Lang which is 4 to 5 times as long as the longest TP word was) are still around.

Toki Pona Day

The creation of this document in the first place.

A friendly place of creativity both artistically and linguistically; maybe talk about sitelen sitelen and the profusion of other nasin sitelen, and the fun people have with sona nasa while exploring all sorts of linguistic concepts

Is Toki Pona an international language? Is it similar or different from Esperanto?

Toki Pona is actively used in international communication, and it is extremely easy to learn (easier to learn than Esperanto? yes). However, its design goals/philosophy are different.

Toki Pona isn't intentionally designed to be an international auxiliary language (and the community doesn't treat it as one), as things you'd need to ask for concrete things like what time it is, or what the address of the nearest hotel is are pretty hard to express. Nonetheless it can be a vehicle for understanding.

It's a philosophical and artistic language that anyone can use

What has changed or developed in the last decade?

Since 2011, many new resources have been created both for and in toki pona. Prominent among these are the two toki pona books, *Toki Pona: The Language of Good* in 2014 and the *Toki Pona Dictionary* in 2021. Additionally, there are a few toki pona magazines like *lipu tenpo* and *lipu kule*.

community-created words (the language has organically evolved/changed, in terms of grammar and also vocabulary, as the community grew over time. maybe talk about how it is not entirely under your control, and you have taken a more descriptive stance on your own creation?)

writing systems changed and developed

various numbering systems were made by the community (kijetesantakalu)

Maybe sth about Jan Misali bringing new people into the community? Bc many found the language through his videos even tho idk how relevant this is

relevant to this, there are a lot more options for learning Toki Pona, not just the book but also courses on Memrise, YouTube, and even a DuoLingo style course in the works

Grammar changes from pre-pu to pu (like en and pi changing)

broadening of kijetesantakalu as revealed in the ancient scrolls found by Jan Wija

More and more toki pona communities developing with their own unique variant of the language/way of speaking

What is ku/What is the new dictionary/Why is there a second book? Why is it descriptive?

The Toki Pona Dictionary represents an updated picture of Toki Pona, checking in with the community and pointing out things from the original book that no longer coincide with how Toki Pona is commonly used, and also validate some common ways of speaking that were not mentioned in the original book or have come to change since the publication of the first book. Of course, the language is governed by the community as are all living languages, and the community collectively decides how to speak the language, not just the books.

[talk about the surveys]

Are there Acadian French words in Toki Pona?

pipi and monsi are the best examples among others.

Why do people learn Toki Pona?

(I think there was a similar survey before the census that collected many answers for why people learn toki pona. on reddit. i think the most common reasons were people saying it was fun and easy?)

(if someone wants to consult the PDF i shared in Discord, it might be a data-driven way to answer this)

(Most common answers in PDF:) Fun/enjoyment/interesting, easy, like simplicity/philosophy, cute, a good challenge, secret language, learning with friends and family

(jan Sa) For me it was the simplicity that attracted me, and the complexity that keeps me using Toki Pona still to this day. There's only around 137 words in the language, so you have to make everything count. There's lots of small thoughts and details that go into translation that aren't apparent in other natural languages. Every word has their own functions and one small change can have a huge difference on how your speech gets received.

(jan Seli) The freedom in how you describe a thing allows you to explain what something means to you or you use it. Music can be "kalama musi" or "musi kalama" and this distinction can be used to show what music means to you.

[this isn't, like, the only reason I like toki pona. but it's a relevant thing that hasn't been said yet. not sure if I should write more for my response or not]

(jan Wikipowa) Saw a comment about toki pona being the simplest language under an Ithkuil video. I couldn't believe a whole language would fit in 120 words. I learned it to challenge myself, and possibly pave the way towards learning other languages (espéranto, japanese, german...)

(jan kijete) For me it was the sense of community. The people in the toki pona community are so loving and caring and I think that comes with the language. Since toki pona had such

a small vocabulary, around 137 words, it was a joy to learn. Because there are so many ways to describe an object, one has to be creative and really get the mind going.
(The community was a huge factor on why I learned toki pona, you all are so nice and loving)

(jan Luwisi) I was interested in how big of a challenge it would be to learn a language that on one hand, has very few words to memorize, but on the other hand works very different from how natural languages and other constructed languages work. Seeing how using such a language would work in practice, was what motivated me to look into it. In the beginning I wanted to consciously learn it together with a friend, but ended up picking up many words and parts of the language by being around the online toki pona community.

(jan Kilima (anu Nili)) I learnt about it from jan Misali and liked the concept of a language that is easy and fun to learn. Then I joined the Discord server and was surprised about how nice and inclusive it was. The fact that you can learn it with the help and feedback of the members has definitely made it a lot of fun.

(jan Pite Janseke) I first thought to have found the definitive list of semantic primitives discovering the language in 2007 when it had only 118 words ... it reminded me of how French linguistics we learnt to analyse the precise meanings of words like chaise, canapé, fauteuil, etc. I translated all these words in Dutch arranging them on one A4 page ... Around 2010 I found out there were new words (pan, esun) and a bit later some more (alasa, namako, kipisi) plus some community words (monsuta, apeja) ... and I found jan Sonja's website which was by now in Wiki modus ... this time I learnt the language to be able to read some of the texts around and to express myself in it , taking also a Memrise course on it This year 2021, I found out about the Discord and the Memrise Essential Toki Pona Vocabulary by Sonja Lang herself ... learning about the new words that came into the language via community usage.

(jan Masu) I was interested in it because of its philosophy at first, and the idea that it could let you express your interior thoughts in simpler ways and figure out what you were really feeling. After I found the community I came to enjoy it in other ways, as a creative medium and a way of communicating ideas in ways that aren't easy to express in English.

(jan Lili) I've always been super interested in language and learning Toki Pona helped fulfill that interest. I was initially drawn in because of how easy it was to learn but I kept learning and speaking it because of how fun and cute the language is. I love how everything seems much happier and upbeat while speaking Toki Pona.

(lipamanka) I needed a new hobby, and toki pona filled that void in my life. Eventually it changed my thought process so much that I continued studying and practicing, and I haven't stopped. I don't think I'll stop for a while.

(jan Orangel) I've always been interested in conlangs and Toki Pona seemed like such an interesting idea to me. It had such a small dictionary so I decided to try it because of its ease of learning, made all the more helpful with the books. I loved its sound and writing, especially how simple it is.

(jan Wija) The idea that I could get a whole language under my fingers within a week or two was fascinating, but the way it simplifies communication and its amazing community are what keep me speaking it to this day.

Can you really say *everything* with so few words?

I could say “I challenge you to give me a random word and I will tell you some common ways people translate it in Toki Pona.” maybe ?

Word of caution though, toki pona can't express anything with so few words (eg, numbers), but it focuses on things deemed important

The point of toki pona is to focus on the essential. While very complex topics and terms would be pretty hard to accurately express in a way that others could understand, picking out the important parts of a sentence and trying to express them using toki pona is encouraged.

because toki pona requires you to break down complex concepts into many words, it naturally makes it easier to talk about simple things or simplify complex things, and discourages (but doesn't prevent) talking about very complicated topics. often, you can't talk about something in toki pona unless you know it well yourself.

One example found in “Toki Pona: The Language of Good” is a paragraph from the Chapter of the Ants which is translated simply as “*mu*” (animal sound).

Other common questions journalists and newcomers will ask?

Writing systems? art? (mention sitelen suwi, sitelen pona, fonts, etc)

Could one do business exchanges in toki pona?

There have been business exchanges done in the past. jan Josan (Jonathan Gabel) created a document in 2009 after jan Mato (Matthew Martin) proposed the idea of writing a sales contract in toki pona on the toki pona forums. jan Josan wrote the document in sitelen sitelen, a mayan-esque logographic system he created, describing the sale of itself to jan Mato. (<https://jonathangabel.com/2012/lipu-lawa-pi-esun-kama/>)

toki pona uses the cooperative principle a lot, basically where you assume the other person has your best interest in mind. it would probably be very very easy to scam someone if the conversation was fully in toki pona. it requires some level of trust between speakers to be most effective.

Can you give us a few examples?

In Toki Pona, most ideas have to be broken down to core elements. An example is the word “protestor:” a common way to translate it is *jan pi wile ante*, a “wanting-change person.” To

ask can be to *wile sona*, “want to know.” A habit can be a *pali pi tenpo mute*, “an action of many occurrences.” And all of these are just one way of saying these English words; they can be broken down differently by different people and situations. In the *Toki Pona Dictionary*, almost every word has more than one translation available, and there are still even more ways than what’s given.

maybe give the *ilo tawa / tomo tawa / kiwen tawa* example? showing how things are named based on personal experience and perspective (if one wants to say *sike tu tu*, my four wheels, that is also usable for a car ...)

Telling them your age in the Kijetesantakalu System (this would be amazing)

Some internet links for further reference on TP

Link to the Discord Server/Reddit/Facebook/Telegram Group?

Links to *pu* and *ku*?

jan Lentans Course?

jan Misalis Videos?

Link to *Sitelen Pona* and *Sitelen Sitelen*?

Exploring Toki Pona: do we need more than 120 words?

[Simon Thomas](#) March 27 / 2018

<https://archive.is/4oS7G>

(blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2018/03/27/toki-pona-invented-language-120-words/)

tokipona.org as a good hub, and maybe jan Lentan’s course or (if they’re out by then) jan Misali’s new 12 days of *kama sona*

Any other ideas for the Press?

(redant on discord) I don’t know if this is an aspect that you’d be comfortable talking about or if we’d be able to find the right people to achieve it - but the press would love it.

Do we know of any toki pona speakers that don’t have a language in common?

Yes - people keep talking about how (theoretically) it can be used as a simple language to facilitate communication between two people with a (relatively - compared to NatLang) shallow learning curve. If the press could see or hear that in action I think that would make for a story that they would love.