

About this course

There are several good sources for learning toki pona available already.

The most important (and best, in my opinion), is the [official toki pona book](#) (also known as “pu”) published in 2014 by Sonja Lang herself. It is not free, but it’s a well-written book with lots of additional texts to read, and it explains the language very well.

A fun video course is jan Misali’s [“12 days of sona pi toki pona”](#) series on YouTube. It covers the entire language in 12 short videos, each featuring 10 words from the official dictionary (psst: the structure of my pages is inspired by it.)

Previously, the online course “o kama sona e toki pona!” (“learn toki pona!”) by Bryant Knight (aka “jan Pije”) served as another important learning resource. Before being retired by its creator, it was one of the earliest toki pona pages available online. As a result, it had some differences in how it used certain words. The earlier versions of the course have also attracted some controversy over including several rather bigoted statements and texts in their content.

My goal here is to try and present a version that tries to account for the different ways people speak and write toki pona and the way it is being used now. Some pages will include “Dialectal differences” sections, in which these differences will be covered. Some of the larger differences will be described right away. I will provide my personal opinions on some of these differences, so while this course does try to be exhaustive, it is not impartial.

The page numbered zero will provide basic info on the language's spelling and pronunciation, and each page past that will introduce 10 words from the language's 120 word dictionary.

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Alternative versions

- [Google Docs version](#)

Other people’s content

- [IBus tables for sitelen pona by jan Komi](#)
- [jan Pije’s video game translations](#)

Software

Here are links to some software that I personally found useful:

- [“ding” dictionary tool](#) is a simple-looking and easy to use dictionary tool that, by default, comes bundled with German-to-English dictionaries, but toki pona-to-English files for it are also available [on this page](#).
- [toki pona keyboard](#) for Android phones. Supports both Latin (with some sitelen pona font features) and sitelen emoji. (WIP)
- [ilo pi sitelen pona](#): a web-based tool that converts Latin-based toki pona into UCSUR-compatible sitelen pona.

Other courses online

- [Jonathan Gabel’s lessons](#) teach both toki pona as a language and “sitelen sitelen”, a rather ornamental-looking (if uncommon in general usage) writing system for toki pona.

Useful resources

Apart from the above-mentioned book and courses, here are some good resources and links for people who want to learn or use toki pona:

- tokipona.net (warning: if your “HTTPS Everywhere” addon is set to “Encrypt All Sites Eligible”, disable it for toki pona.net, or else it will redirect you to an unrelated website)
- [“lipu lili pona”, a description of toki pona’s rules and vocabulary on 2 pages](#)
- [Another description of toki pona’s rules and vocab on 2 pages](#)
- [A toki pona dictionary with sitelen pona characters](#) by “The Other Website”
- [toki pona flashcards for Anki](#)
 - [flashcards based on this website](#), by u/parentis_shotgun
- [jan Sotan’s description of his personal style, including the informal “tok’ apona” dialect](#)

Other people’s original works

- [“musi lili”, a page by jan Same](#)
- [lipu kule, a blog with posts in toki pona by various people](#)
- [“lipu tenpo”, a toki pona magazine](#)
- [lipu Wikipesija, a recent project to make a toki pona Wikipedia](#) NEW
- [Russian TV: “Art Revolution” on conlangs](#) with subtitles by me
- [nasin tenpo pona](#), a calendar system that uses toki pona words

Discussion groups and chats

- [/r/tokipona subreddit](#)
- [“ma pona pi toki pona” Discord server](#)
- [toki pona Telegram group](#)
 - IRC channel #tokipona on Freenode, bridged with the Telegram group
- [“kulupu pi toki pona” Telegram group](#) (this one is usually more about talking *in* toki pona)

Jan oli toki pona

PAGE 1:

The language *toki pona* only uses 14 letters of the Latin alphabet, and all of these letters have consistent pronunciations.

These are: a,e,i,j,k,l,m,n,o,p,s,t,u,w.

You might have noticed that all these letters are lowercase. This is because all toki pona words are spelled in lowercase, even at the start of sentences.

The consonants (j,k,l,m,n,p,s,t,w) use the same sounds as those in English, with the exception of “j”, which instead sounds like the English “y”.

The vowels (a,e,i,o,u) are a bit more complicated to explain (but simpler to pronounce). Unlike English, every vowel uses the same sound in all words. If you know how to pronounce the vowel sounds in Spanish, Japanese or Esperanto, then you can pronounce them the same way in toki pona.

For examples of English words with corresponding pronunciations:

- **a** sounds like the “a” in the word “far” or (in some dialects of English) the “u” in “up” or the “a” in “bath”.
- **e** sounds like the “e” in the word “bet”.
- **i** sounds like the “i” in the word “bit” or “ee” in “wee”.
- **o** sounds like the “o” in the word “or”.
- **u** sounds like the “oo” in “oops” or “moon”.

The “International Phonetic Alphabet” (IPA) is a common way to write down specific pronunciations of words and phrases in any language.

It uses a version of the Latin alphabet with lots of additional characters added. For example, the IPA pronunciation of the English word “language” is /ˈlæŋɡwɪdʒ/, but in toki pona, every single letter’s pronunciation is its IPA symbol! So “toki pona” is pronounced /toki pona/.

Since there are so few sounds, the way they can be pronounced can be very flexible. For example, some might substitute the sounds “p,t,k” with “b,d,g”. Such a shift would cause a lot of ambiguity or confusion in other languages, but toki pona’s sounds were chosen to be common to many languages and easy to distinguish.

All toki pona words are pronounced with stress on their first syllable.

Exercises

Here are some toki pona words that are derived from, or sound similar to, other English words:

toki pona	derived from and sounds similar to
jaki	yucky
jelo	yellow
ken	can
mani	money
mi	me
mun	moon
tu	two
wan	one

Ki

toki pona	sounds similar to (may depend on ur dialect)
jan	young
jo	yo!
kama	comma
lukin	looking
pan	pun
sama	summer
sin	seen

PAGE 2:

The vocabulary for this page:

word	meaning
mi	I, me, us
sina	you
ona	he, she, they, it
li	(between subj. and verb/adj.)
pona	good, simple, to improve, to fix
ike	bad, evil, complex, unnecessary
suli	big, great, important, to grow
lili	small, few, young, to shrink
kili	fruit, vegetable, mushroom
soweli	land mammal, animal

Let's start with the most basic sentence structure in toki pona:

[noun] li [noun / adjective].

In English, this would mean:

[Noun] is (a) [noun]. Or [Noun] is [adjective].

For example:

ona li suli. - (He/she/it/they) is (big/great/important).

As you can see, a single word can have multiple related meanings. In practical usage, both “ona” and “suli” will be more clear based on context.

kili li pona. - (Fruit/vegetable/mushroom)(s) (is/are) good.

And in this case, it doesn't make a lot of sense to use any meaning of “pona” other than “good”.

There is an exception to the rule. If the subject is “mi” or “sina”, then it is not necessary to add the word “li”. So, instead of

sina li suli. - You are important.

It's

sina suli. - You are important.

Exercises

Now, how would you express the following ideas?

- Animals are important soweli li suli
- He is little ona li lili
- I am great. mi suli

- It is a dog. ona li soweli
- You are bad. sina ike
- PAGE 3:

The vocabulary for this page:

word	meaning
ala	no, not, zero
ale/ali	all, everything, universe
utala	fight, battle, challenge
wawa	strong, powerful
suwi	sweet, cute, adorable
jan	person, people, humanity
mama	parent, ancestor, creator, origin
meli	woman, female, feminine, wife
mije	man, male, masculine, husband
moku	food, to eat

To define subjects and adjectives more clearly, you can add extra words as adjectives. In toki pona, an adjective that modifies a noun stands after the noun in question. This is unlike English, where adjectives go before nouns, but similar to French. So, for example:

jan wawa – strong person

Many of the nouns covered before can also function as adjectives. For example, the pronouns “mi”, “sina” and “ona” can serve as possessives.

mama mi – my parent

soweli sina – your animal

moku ona – your food

In addition, adjectives can function as nouns:

wawa sina – your strength

suli ona – their greatness

Of note is the phrase “jan pona”, which literally means “good person”, but is widely (and officially) accepted to also mean “friend”.

Several adjectives can be added at once:

soweli lili suwi – cute pet (“little animal”)

Here are some example sentences that demonstrate this:

mama mi li pona. - My parents are good.

kili suwi li moku pona. - Sweet fruits are good food. - sweet fruit is good food

jan utala li wawa. - The warrior ("fighting person") is strong. -

jan lili mi li suwi. - My children ("young people") are cute.

soweli lili li wawa ala. - Little animals are not strong.

It is worth noting that the particle "li" is only removed if the subject is just the word "mi" or "sina". If it has any adjectives added to it, then the particle is used.

sina pona. - You are good.

sina ale li pona. - All of you ("you all") are good.

In addition to "mije" and "meli", some people also use the word "tonsi" to refer to non-binary people, genderqueer people or others who don't fit into either "man" or "woman". See [extra page 1](#) for more information.

Exercises

Now, try to figure out the meaning of these sentences.

- meli mi li pona. (my wife is good)
- mije sina li sulī. (hi is [great, important, big, growing])
- mama mije mi li wawa. (my mother is [strong powerful])
- soweli ale li pona. (the [animal, mammal] are all good)
- kili li moku sulī. (eat [fruit, vegetable] to grow)

And try to translate the following sentences into toki pona.

- My wife is adorable. (meli mi li suwi)
- All warriors are bad. (ale li jan utala ike)
- My friends are your friends. (jan pona mi sina jan pona)
- Your son is strong. (sina lili mije li wawa)
- The small fruit is sweet. (kili li lili suwi)

PAGE 4:

The vocabulary for this page:

word	meaning
e	(specifies an object)
ijo	thing, object
ilo	tool, machine, device
lipu	book, document, paper
lukin	eye, to look, to see, to seek to
olin	love, compassion, affection
pali	to do, to work, to make, labor
pana	to give, to send, to emit
telo	water, fluid, to water, to clean
tomo	home, room, structure

To add a verb to the sentence, use the following structure:

[noun] li [verb]

For example,

mije li pali. - A man is working. / A man works.

Both the noun and the verb can have adjectives added after it. If added after a verb, the adjective functions as an adverb.

jan wawa li pali pana. - A strong person is working well.

There is no way to determine whether a word in such a sentence is an adjective or a verb. For example, the phrase “mi moku” can mean either “I am eating” or “I am food”.

Verbs don't have any tense information in them. A way to specify time will be explained in a later page.

To add an object – the thing that the verb applies to – use the particle “e” for a following structure:

[subject] li [verb] e [object]

jan wawa li pali e tomo. - A strong person is (building/working on) a house.

Objects can also have adjectives added to them.

jan pali li pana e moku pana. - A worker gives out good food.

Here are some sentences:

jan pana mi li pana e ilo lukin. - My friend is (improving/fixing) a looking instrument (glasses, binoculars, microscope, etc.).

mi telo e moku. - I clean the food.

mi olin e meli mi. - I love my wife.

Since the word “lukin” itself describes the act of seeing someone, rather than their appearance, complimenting someone on the latter would usually be expressed as:

sina pona lukin. - You look good (are “good visually”).

Exercises

Now, try to figure out the meaning of these sentences.

- jan lili li pana e telo lukin. (children cry [emit water from eyes])
- ona li lukin e lipu. ([he/she/they] are reading a [document/book])
- soweli ike li utala e meli.
- jan utala li moku e kili suli.
- soweli lili li moku e telo.
- mi telo e ijo suli.

And try to translate the following sentences into toki pona.

- She loves every person.
- The bathroom (“house of water”) is good.
- I hand out documents.
- An evil warrior is looking at your house.
- My tools are working well.

PAGE 5:

The vocabulary for this page:

word	meaning
jo	to have/carry/contain/hold
kala	fish, marine animal, sea creature
kasi	plant, grass, herb, leaf
pipi	insect, bug
sitelen	symbol, image, writing, to draw
toki	speech, to talk, language
waso	bird, flying creature
ma	earth, land, outdoors, territory
kiwen	hard object, metal, stone, solid
ko	powder, clay, semi-solid

This page will only cover the ten new words and a few small concepts.

jan pali li telo e kasi. - The worker is watering the plants.

jan wawa li jo e kiwen suli. - The strong person is carrying big rocks.

telo suli li jo e kala. - The sea/ocean (“big water”) has fish.

mi sitelen e toki sina. - I’m writing down your speech.

waso lili li moku e pipi. - The small bird eats bugs.

ma tomo mi li suli. - My city (“housed land”) is big.

Topics of conversation

There is no consensus on which of these ways is more correct, but each has its own positives and negatives. Everything in this entire heading is one big “dialectal difference”, and the author’s opinions on the differences will follow.

There are two commonly used ways to specify the topic of conversation when using the word “toki”.

The simpler one, as it was used in “o kama sona e toki pona!”, is to specify the topic as an adjective:

ona li toki meli. – They talk about women.

However, it introduces uncertainty when actual adjectives that apply to “toki” are introduced. Does “toki ike” mean “speak badly” or “talk about evil”?

The official book is rather unclear on the subject, but it uses “toki e ijo” to mean “communicate things” and “toki wawa” as “testify” (“speak strongly”), rather than “talk about strength”.

The extended version of this approach, as also commonly used in the toki pona community, is to use the topic as an object:

sina toki e kala. – You talk about fish.

While this is sometimes considered a rather unconventional use of the particle “e” for some, it is less ambiguous and more flexible. For clarity’s sake, this option will be used throughout the course.

Sonja Lang uses the preposition “lon” in this situation:

mi toki lon ijo. – I talk about something.

Example sentences

And here’s some sentences that use interesting phrases.

jan pali li toki utala e tomo mi. - The worker criticizes (“talks in a fighting way about”) my house.

ona li toki ike e jan pona mi. - They (insult / speak bad things about) my friend(s).

You can put several verbs and several objects into one sentence by adding extra particles “li” or “e” followed by their verbs or objects.

meli li toki e soweli, e waso. - A woman is talking about land animals and birds.

jan pali li pona e ilo, li lukin e lipu. - A worker fixes the device and looks at (reads) a document.

Phrases

The word “toki”, when used by itself, is a common greeting:

toki! – Hello!

Dialectal differences

This part of the document describes how certain toki pona courses differ in explaining certain ideas.

If the subject is “mi” or “sina” (and therefore it doesn’t have a particle “li”), you can do one of two things to add an extra verb.

- The official book (“pu”) suggests that you simply duplicate the sentence:

mi pali. mi moku. - I work and eat.

- The “12 days of sona pi toki pona” videos instead suggest adding a “li” particle (as did “o kama sona e toki pona!”):

mi pali, li moku. - I work and eat.

Exercises

Now, try to figure out the meaning of these sentences.

- mi moku ala e soweli.
- jan pona sina li toki e ma, e telo.
- jan sulì li lukin e ma tomo, li sitelen e ijo.
- ma li jo e kasi ike.
- pipi lili li sulì, li pona.

And try to translate the following sentences into toki pona.

- Your city doesn’t have any workers.
- My husband doesn’t work, (only) eats and fights.
- My homeland (“original land”) is large.
- Your painting looks good.
- My friend has fish and fruit and makes good food.

PAGE 6:

The vocabulary for this page:

word	meaning
ante	different, changed, to change
awen	keep, stay, endure, protect, continue
en	and (combines subjects)
kalama	sound, noise, to read/make sound
kulupu	group, community, society
lape	sleep, rest
mute	many, more, quantity, very

ni	this, that
pakala	break, mistake, (generic curse)
seli	fire, heat, warmth, chemical reaction

Before we discover a whole new type of words and new grammar, let's fill in some blanks.

The word “en” lets one combine several subjects in one sentence:

mi en sina li moku. – You and I are eating.

Note that it is *not* used to combine several verbs or objects – the way to do that was explained on [page 4](#).

The word “mute” allows to specify whether the subject (or object) is singular or plural.

jan utala mute – many warriors

mi mute – we, us

Here are some example sentences:

jan lili mute li lape. – The children are sleeping.

kiwen suli li pakala e tomo lipu. – A big rock damaged the library (“house of books”).

mi pakala lili. – I made a little mistake.

ilo sina li kalama mute ike. – Your instrument is making lots of bad noise.

The word “ni”

The simplest use of the word “ni” is to mean “this” or “that”:

kulupu ni li pona mute. – This community is very good.

However, it is much more powerful than that. The word “ni” can also be used to create more complex sentences.

It can be used to talk about what other people say (or even quote them, depending on context):

jan lili li toki e ni: sina pona. – The child said that you're good.

ona li toki e ni: “toki! sina pona lukin.” – They said: “Hello! You look good.”

Or it can be used to provide even more detailed descriptions of subjects or objects.

jan pali ni li pali e tomo mi: ona li jo e kiwen mute. – The worker with lots of rocks built my home. (“This worker built my home: they have lots of rocks.”)

Dialectal differences

This part of the document describes how certain toki pona courses differ in explaining certain ideas.

There doesn't seem to be an agreement whether or not “en” can be used within phrases that use the particle “pi” (will be explained in [page 9](#)). In addition, Sonja Lang herself said that using “en” to combine several objects is “not completely wrong” ([1](#)), but rather stylistically inelegant.

Exercises

Now, try to figure out the meaning of these sentences.

- kulupu sina li ante mute.
- jan ike li pakala e ilo mi.
- mi pali e tomo ni.
- jan utala pona mute li awen e kulupu ni.
- kulupu suli li awen, li suli e ona.

And try to translate the following sentences into toki pona.

- Warm food is very good.
- Sleeping children don't make noises.
- The workers said that they are strong and tough.
- You look different.
- This house preserves the heat.

PAGE 7:

The vocabulary for this page will be divided into two groups. Prepositions:

word	meaning
kepeken	to use, using, with the help of
lon	in, at, on, true, present, exist
sama	same as, similar, like, sibling
tan	from, because of, cause, reason

tawa	to, for, moving, from persp. of
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And regular words (which in this case all relate to locations):

word	meaning
sewi	up, above, sky, divine, sacred
noka	foot, leg, bottom, under
poka	hip, side, next to, nearby
monsi	back, behind, rear, butt
sinpin	face, foremost, front, wall

Prepositions are words that are attached to other parts of the sentence in order to express a place or time (more on that in the future) or a specific detail about the action.

In toki pona, the words “kepeken”, “lon”, “sama”, “tan” and “tawa” are used as prepositions, by being added at the end of the sentence without any extra particles.

Here are some examples of all five of these words, both as prepositions and as regular words:

mi pona e tomo kepeken ilo mi. – I am repairing the house using my tools.

mi toki kepeken toki pona. – I speak in toki pona.

sina kepeken e ilo sitelen. – You are using a writing/drawing tool (pen, pencil, brush).

mi lon tomo sina. – I am in your house.

jan ike li kalama mute lon tomo lipu. – A bad person is being very noisy in the library.

ona li toki e ijo lon. – He/she/they speak the truth (“talk about things that exist”).

mi en sina li sama. – You and I are similar.

meli sama mi li pona. – My sister is good.

kiwen lili li sama lukin pipi. – The pebble (“small rock”) looks like a bug.

mi lape tan ni: mi jo ala e wawa. – I sleep, because i don’t have any energy.

mi tawa tan tomo mi. – I am leaving my house.

ona li awen lon tomo lipu. – They stayed in the library.

tomo tawa mi li pona. – My car (“moving house/structure”) is good.

mi tawa tomo moku. – I am going to the restaurant (“house of food”).

The word “tawa” can also express perspective.

sina pona tawa mi. – I like you. (“You are good for me.”)

Since “tawa” can be both an adjective and a preposition, certain phrases can be ambiguous. For example, “tomo tawa mi” can mean both “my car” and “a house, from my perspective”. The specific meaning will depend on context.

And here are some examples of the location words:

waso mute li lon sewi. – Many birds are in the sky.

mi awen lon tomo mi. – I am staying in my house.

mi toki tawa jan sewi. – I speak to a (deity/angel/someone divine/(possibly literally) man in the sky).

mi tawa kepeken noka mi. – I am moving on foot (“using my legs”).

kiwen lili li lon noka mi. – A small rock is below me.

mi tawa lon poka sina. – I walk beside you.

jan poka li ike tawa mi. – I don’t like my neighbor.

poka mi li pakala. – My hip/side is broken.

ona li lon monsi sina. – They are behind you.

jan utala mute li lon sinpin mi. – Warriors are standing in front of me.

lipu sulì li lon sinpin ni. – An important document is on this wall.

sinpin ona li pona lukin. – Their face looks good.

Phrases

There are two different ways to say “goodbye”. If you are leaving, it’s:

mi tawa! – Goodbye! (literally “I’m going.”)

If someone else is leaving, it’s:

tawa pona! – Goodbye! (literally “Good movement!”)

In fact, a lot of words followed by “pona” are used as greetings.

moku pona! – Bon appetit! / Have a nice meal! (literally “Good food!”)

lape pona! – Good night! / Sweet dreams! (literally “Good sleep!”)

There is also a phrase that functions as many positive expressions, from “thanks” all the way to “peace be upon you”:

pona tawa sina! (literally “Good to you!”)

Dialectal differences

This part of the document describes how certain toki pona courses differ in explaining certain ideas.

- The official book uses “lon” with a wider meaning, also including “with”. For example, “I speak in toki pona” is translated as “mi toki lon toki pona”. This does not seem to be a common usage of the word.
- The official book uses “noka” to mean both “foot” and “below”. This is a relatively new usage, and other courses prefer using “anpa” instead of “noka” to mean “below” (using “noka” only to specifically mean “leg” or “foot”.) The word “anpa” will be covered in [page 7](#).
- Sometimes, words like “kepeken” and “tawa” can be used both as prepositions (“using”, “towards”) and as verbs (“to use”, “to move”). The official book provides an example for “kepeken”, where it’s used as a verb:

o kepeken ala ilo ike. – Don’t use bad tools.

But frequently in the toki pona community the “e” particle is still added, as “kepeken” is used as a transitive verb, not a preposition:

mi kepeken e ilo. – I’m using tools.

(This method was also preferred by the “o kama sona e toki pona!” course.)

The difference is that in the former example, the object (“ilo ike”) is directly followed by the phrase “kepeken ala”, and in the latter, “kepeken” is followed by “e”, like for any other verb.

This course will follow the latter convention, since it is less ambiguous and allows for more grammar (For example, it’s possible to more clearly add modifiers after “kepeken”). But in most such sentences, whether or not “e” is used should not make the meaning ambiguous.

Exercises

Now, try to figure out the meaning of these sentences.

- ona li toki tawa mama mije ona kepeken ilo toki.
- moku suwi li ike tawa mi.
- ma mama mi li utala e ma poka.
- meli sama sina li jan pona mi.
- pipi lili li lon sinpin sina.

And try to translate the following sentences into toki pona.

- You broke my car.
- The man feeds (“gives out food to”) children.
- I dislike this chat room (“talking structure”).
- I fixed the house because of you.
- They are reading books in the library.

PAGE 8:

The vocabulary for this page:

word	meaning
a	(emotional interjection)
anu	or
mu	(any animal sound)
o	(addressing people, commands)
seme	what? (for questions)

word	meaning
kute	listen, hear, obey, ear
nimi	word, name
lawa	head, control, own, rule, main
anpa	lowly, humble, dependent, to conquer/defeat, to bow down
insa	inside, contents, center, stomach

Vocabulary notes

The word “anpa”’s different verb meanings sound mutually exclusive, but the actual meaning changes depending on what word follows after that.

If “anpa” is used as a verb with “e” and an object following it, then it means “to conquer” or “to defeat”:

- jan wawa li anpa e jan utala ike. – The strong person defeated the bad warrior.

However, if “anpa” is used without an object, or with a preposition like “tawa”, then it means “to bow down”:

- jan pali li anpa tawa jan lawa. – The worker bowed down to the boss.

By itself, the word “anu” means “or”:

ona li pona mute anu ike mute. mi sona ala. – It is (either) very good or very bad. I don’t know.

Interjections and commands

The word “a” functions like a emotional interjection, used to emphasize or add emotion to the sentence. It is usually either added at the end of a sentence or functions as a sentence on its own.

sina suwi a! – You are so cute!

More specifically, laughter is indicated with the sentence “a a a!” (ha ha ha!).

The word “mu” substitutes for any sound made by any animal.

The word “o” is used to address people and issue commands.

When used on its own at the beginning of a sentence, it turns the rest of the message into a command.

o kute e mi! – Listen to me!

When used after a noun phrase, it addresses a person.

sina o! – Hey, you!

jan ale o! – Everybody!

Both uses can be combined.

jan pali o, kepeken e ilo awen! – Worker, use protective equipment!

Questions

There are two ways to ask questions in toki pona.

If you want to ask a yes-or-no question, you phrase the sentence normally, but replace the word being questioned with a “[word] ala [word]” structure.

sina pona ala pona? – Are you okay?

There are no words for “yes” and “no”, so to answer positively, you repeat the word being used, and to answer negatively, you add “ala”.

pona. – Yes.

pona ala. – No.

(From what I understand, this structure is similar to what is used in Mandarin.)

ona li pali ala pali? – Are they working?

jan lili li moku ala moku? – Are the children eating?

Alternatively, you can add “anu seme” (“or what?”) at the end of the sentence instead.

sina pona anu seme? – Are you okay?

For freeform questions, you start with a regular sentence and insert “seme” into the part you want to ask:

sina pali e seme? – What are you (doing/working on)? (“You work on what?”)

jan seme li pakala e ona? – Who broke it? (“What person broke it?”)

ijo ni li seme? – What is this thing? (“This thing is what?”)

sewi li laso tan seme? – Why is the sky blue? (“Sky is blue because of what?”)

Names (unofficial words)

So far, these pages only relied on native toki pona words to refer to things and people. But this is clearly not enough when you need to call someone by their name. For proper names, toki pona uses so-called “unofficial words”. These are usually names of people, cities, countries, etc., taken from their native languages and adapted to toki pona’s pronunciation rules. Unlike all toki pona words, they’re spelled with the first letter capitalized.

Unofficial words are always treated as adjectives, which means that before them is always a noun or a noun phrase describing what is being referred to.

jan Mimi – (the person) Mimi

ma Kanata – (the country) Canada

toki Inli – (the language) English

ma tomo Napoli – (the city) Naples

Alternatively, the unofficial words can actually be used as adjectives:

jan Kanata – a Canadian person

Since there are multiple ways of matching native names to toki pona sounds, there may ultimately be several different unofficial names for the same city or country's name. (Although there are dictionaries that include lists of toki pona names for countries, cities and languages that people can use.)

Also, people speaking toki pona are free to pick their own personal toki pona names, either by adapting the name from their native language or coming up with something new.

As you might have noticed, personal names are prefixed with “jan”. People in the toki pona community may refer to themselves with their toki pona name even when using other languages, in which case they'll still add “jan” at the beginning.

The [page 7a](#) contains some more information about how unofficial words are created.

While this isn't the most correct option, it is okay in most cases to not use unofficial words and just pronounce or spell the name how you would do in your (or their) native language. For example, you can refer to a person named Robert as “jan Lope” or “jan Robert”.

Examples

o toki ala a! – Shut up! (“Don't talk!”)

sina pali ala pali e ni? – Did you do this?

mi jan San. mi lon ma Mewika. – I am John. I live in the United States.

nimi sina li seme? – What is your name?

jan lawa mi li ike mute. – (My boss / our leader) is very bad.

jan Lopin o, toki! – Hi, Robin!

Exercises

Now, try to figure out the meaning of these sentences.

- jan Lisa o, moku ala e kili ni a!
- kulupu Kensa li anpa e kulupu ale ante.
- o toki insa ala e ni: jan pali li anpa tawa jan lawa.

- sina pali e ni tan seme?
- insa mi li pakala. o pona e mi a!

And try to translate the following sentences into toki pona.

- I don't think gods exist.
- Don't make noise in the library.
- My boss tells me not to sleep in the office.
- Your brother looks just like you.
- Don't go outside.

PAGE 9:

The vocabulary for this page:

word	meaning
kule	color, colorful
jelo	yellow (and its shades)
laso	blue, green (and its shades)
loje	red (and its shades)
pimeja	black, dark
walo	white, bright/light
nasa	unusual, strange, crazy, drunk
jaki	dirty, disgusting, toxic
moli	death, dying
unpa	sexual (or marital) relations

Colors

In toki pona, there are five basic color terms: “loje” (red), “jelo” (yellow), “laso” (blue and green), “pimeja” (black) and “walo” (white).

These terms can be combined with each other, or words referring to natural things, to form other shades:

laso sewi – blue (“sky green/blue”)

laso kasi – green (“plant green/blue”)

loje jelo – orange (“yellowish red”)

jelo pimeja – brown (“dark yellow”)

walo pimeja – gray (“dark white”)

loje walo – pink (“light red”)

Example sentences

kili loje lili li pona tawa mi. – I like small red fruits (strawberries/raspberries?).

jan lili li pana e ko jaki tan monsi ona. – The kid pooped himself.

jan Simu o, mije li moli. – He’s dead, Jim.

tomo ni li jo e jaki mute. ni li ike tawa mi a! – This room is covered in gross materials. I don’t like it!

mije mi li unpa ala e jan ante. – My husband is faithful (“doesn’t have sex with other people”).

Comparative sentences

While there are words in toki pona for “good” or “bad”, there is no “better” or “worse”. While there are words for “lots” and “little”, there’s no “more” or “less”.

To make a comparative statement, you instead split it into two sentences:

mi wawa. sina wawa lili. – I am stronger than you. (I am strong. You are slightly strong.)

Of course, the degree of comparison can be adjusted by changing the difference between the adjectives.

mi wawa mute. sina wawa ala. – I am way stronger than you. (I am very strong. You are weak.)

Exercises

Now, try to figure out the meaning of these sentences.

- kule loje li pona tawa mi.
- o pana e telo kili jelo tawa mi.
- kasi kule sina li pona lukin tawa mi.
- mi moku ala e telo nasa.
- o moli ala e ona a!

And try to translate the following sentences into toki pona.

- Your house is bigger than mine.
- I like blue flowers more than red flowers.
- Ew, gross! This food is terrible!
- I'm in the red house.
- The drunk person doesn't listen to me.

PAGE 10:

The vocabulary for this page:

word	meaning
pi	“of” (regroups adjectives/adverbs)
la	“if/when” (introduces context)
luka	hand, arm
linja	long flexible object, string, rope, hair
palisa	long solid object, branch, stick
selo	outer form, shell, skin, boundary
sijelo	body, physical state, torso
len	cloth, clothes, layer of privacy
lete	cold, raw
musi	entertaining, artistic, fun, game

Time to introduce two other particles in this language: “pi” and “la”.

pi

The word “pi” works by grouping several adjectives or adverbs together. Normally, all modifiers in a phrase apply to the first word. For example:

jan wawa – strong person

jan wawa ala – no strong people

If you need to say “weak people”, you need to negate “wawa”, but not “jan”. That’s where “pi” comes in handy:

jan pi wawa ala – weak person/people (“of no strength”)

This also goes with other words:

jan wawa mute – many strong people

jan pi wawa mute – very strong person/people

It is also useful for using common phrases:

jan toki utala – a speaker warrior

jan pi toki utala – a critic

If you prefer using the “toki [adjective]” structure for describing topics of conversation (see [page 4](#) for that), then “pi” would also be used for specifying topics that use several words:

sina toki pi ma tomo mama sina. – You talk about your hometown.

pi with colors

Also, “pi” is frequently used for combined colors (these were described in [page 8](#)):

sewi pi pimeja walo li ike tawa mi. – I don’t like gray skies.

I believe it’s also okay to omit “pi”, but that might be ambiguous:

sewi pimeja walo li ike tawa mi. – I don’t like gray skies.

Some might interpret the latter as “skies that have both white and black” instead.

pi with unofficial words

The word “pi” is also used for phrases that use unofficial words.

ma tomo Wasintan li ma tomo lawa pi ma Mewika. – (the city of) Washington is the capital (“main city”) of the United States.

While “pi” is often defined as similar to the English word “of”, its usage is different. It is only necessary when you’re grouping several words together. So, for example, “the language of good” is still “toki pona”, rather than “toki pi pona”.

la

The word “la” allows to combine two sentences to form conditions and introduce context.

[sentence A] la [sentence B].

In the context of [sentence A], [sentence B].

In the most common case, translates to something like:

If/when [sentence A], then [sentence B].

For example:

moku ni li pona la mi pana e ona tawa sina. – If this food is good, I'll give it to you.

ona li moli la ni li ike tawa jan ale. – If they die, it will be bad for everybody.

But there are also other uses. It can replace “lon [phrase]” when talking about location or time (more on that in the [next page](#)):

o kalama ala lon tomo lipu. – Be quiet in the library.

tomo lipu la o kalama ala. – In the library, be quiet.

It can also introduce perspective, much like “tawa”:

ni li pona tawa mi. – This is good for me. / I like it.

mi la ni li pona. – (From my point of view / In my opinion), this is good.

Or be used to link multiple sentences:

tan ni la... – Because of this, ...

ni la... – In the context of all this, ...

The usage of “la” is very flexible, and some people use it for cases other than those described before. Since toki pona is a very context-sensitive language, the most important rule is just “try to get your point across”.

Dialectal differences

This part of the document describes how certain toki pona courses differ in explaining certain ideas, or how communities differ in using them.

The official book, different online courses and my personal style differ on how to place punctuation in sentences that use “la”.

The official book uses a comma before “la” when it combines two sentences and uses no punctuation otherwise.

The “12 days of sona pi toki pona” video series uses no punctuation in all cases (and so did the “o kama sona e toki pona!” course).

I personally prefer using the comma after “la” for aesthetic purposes, but in this series, no punctuation will be used. Regardless, the presence or absence of commas in toki pona texts is largely aesthetic, as the functions they serve in English and other languages (separating clauses, listing things) are done either with separate sentences or by adding extra particles in toki pona.

Exercises

Now, try to figure out the meaning of these sentences.

- kulupu pi jan mute li ike tawa mi.
- tomo ni la mi toki kepeken toki pona, mi toki kepeken toki Inli.
- sina moku e soweli lete la ona li ike tawa sijelo sina.
- kalama musi ona li pona mute.
- sina kepeken ike e ilo la ona li pakala.

And try to translate the following sentences into toki pona.

- I like blue sky more than gray sky.
- If it’s dark outside, stay at home.
- He is in the bar (“house of crazy water”).
- The loud person (“person of large sounds”) says weird things.
- That blonde (“woman of white hair”) is good-looking.
- If you don’t talk to people, you won’t have friends.
-

The vocabulary for this page – pre-verbs:

word	meaning
kama	coming, future, event
ken	can, ability, possibility
open	start, begin, open
pini	end, finish, close
sona	knowledge, to know (how to)
wile	want, need, desire

Words not in this table can be used as pre-verbs as well, such as “awen” and “lukin”.

and regular words:

word	meaning
lupa	hole, door, window
nasin	path, road, directive, way
nena	hill, mountain, button, bump,nose
tenpo	time, moment

Pre-verbs

Time to cover the last grammatical feature of toki pona: pre-verbs. These are words that are added before other verbs and modify their meaning.

The word “**kama**” is used both as a regular verb to mean “to come” and to express that something is a current event:

mi jo e moku. – I have food.

mi kama jo e moku. – I (got / am getting) food.

mi kama tan ma Losi – I come from Russia.

As a pre-verb, the word “**ken**” functions much like the English word “can”:

mi pali e tomo. – I work on a house.

mi ken pali e tomo. – I can work on a house.

It can be used on its own to mean “possibility”, “ability”:

ni li ken. – This is possible.

ken la ale li pona. – Maybe everything is okay.

The words “**open**” and “**pini**” express that the action is beginning or ending.

mi open pali e tomo. – I start working on a house.

mi pini pali e tomo. – I stop/finish working on a house.

The word “**sona**” by itself can mean “knowledge” or “to know”, but as a pre-verb, it means “know how to [do the action]”:

mi sona pali e tomo. – I know how to work on a house.

mi sona e ni. – I know this.

mi sona sitelen. – I know how to write/draw.

mi sona e sitelen. – I know a writing/picture.

ona li sona ala sona e toki Inli? – Do they know English?

When “kama” is added before “sona”, you get a phrase that means “to learn”:

jan lili li kama sona toki. – The child is learning how to speak.

mi kama sona e toki pona. – I am learning toki pona.

or alternatively:

mi kama sona toki kepeken toki pona. – I am learning how to speak in toki pona.

The word “**wile**” is used to express want or need for the following action or thing.

jan lili li wile moku. – The child (is hungry / wants to eat).

jan lili li wile e ijo musi. The child wants a toy (“amusing thing”).

wile sina li suli mute. – Your needs/desires are very big.

In addition to these words, the words “**awen**” and “**lukin**” can also be used as pre-verbs. “awen” as a pre-verb means “to keep/continue [doing something]” and “lukin” means “to look for, to seek, to try [to do something]”.

ona li lukin e lipu. – They are reading a book.

ona li awen lukin e lipu. – They are still reading a book.

mi jo e tomo. – I have a house.

mi lukin jo e tomo. – I’m searching for a house (to own).

Time

The word “tenpo” is useful, because it’s at the basis of many phrases that allow one to define time at which something is happening. Since toki pona doesn’t have grammatical tenses, the way time is generally described is by using an additional phrase:

tenpo ni la mi moku. – (Right now,) I eat.

or

mi moku lon tenpo ni. – I eat (at this time).

(As explained in [page 9](#), such uses of “lon” and “la” are interchangeable in other cases as well.)

The phrases “tenpo pini” and “tenpo kama” are commonly used to mean “past” and “future”.

tenpo pini la mi pali e ijo ike mute. – I did a lot of bad things in the past.

tenpo kama la o moku ala e kasi ni. – In the future, don’t eat this plant.

Of course, you can ask questions regarding time by using “tenpo seme”:

tenpo seme la sina pini e pali sina? – When will you finish your work?

Dialectal differences

This part of the document describes how certain toki pona courses differ in explaining certain ideas, or how communities differ in using them.

The words “open” and “pini” are used as pre-verbs by some in the toki pona community, but they’re not defined or used as such in the official toki pona book or the “o kama sona e toki pona!” course.

Exercises

Now, try to figure out the meaning of these sentences.

- o open e lupa.
- tenpo lili la mi kama tawa sina.
- mi wile tawa ma ante.
- sina ken ala ken kama tawa tomo mi?
- sina kama tawa tomo mi la o kepeken e nasin Linkan.
- sina lon nena la sina ken lukin e ijo mute.

And try to translate the following sentences into toki pona.

- Do you know how to do it?

- Everything is possible.
- Can you open the door?
- If you don't listen to experts ("people of knowledge"), your work will be bad.
- I work on this for a long time.
- I'm still learning toki pona.

PAGE 11:

The vocabulary for this page:

word	meaning
wan	one, part (of something), united
tu	two, divide, divided
sike	circle, round, ball, year
mani	money, large domesticated animal
esun	trade, market, shop, exchange
mun	moon, star, night sky object
nanpa	number, (ordinal indicator)
poki	box, container, bowl, cup, drawer
sin	new, additional, fresh, extra
suno	sun, light, brightness, shine

Numerals

The most basic numerals in toki pona are these words:

- ala - 0, nothing
- wan - 1
- tu - 2
- mute (many) - 3 or more
- ale (all) - everything, endless

This is, quite obviously, a very limited system. But it is not unique to toki pona: languages from some hunter-gatherer societies stop their numerals at three, two or even one. (In fact, the Pirahã language is reported to only have had words for "small quantity" and "large quantity", the values of which change based on context.)

However, there is also a second, additional system that is officially defined, and commonly used, to describe larger numbers. It repurposes some of toki pona's words as additional numerals:

- ala - 0
- wan - 1
- tu - 2
- luka (hand) - 5
- mute (many) - 20
- ale (all) - 100

In this system, words are added or repeated in order to form numbers. For example, 42 is "mute mute tu" (20+20+2) and 18 is "luka luka luka tu wan" (5+5+5+2+1).

As you can see, this is still a rather limited system. Just to name the year in which this page was originally written (2020), it would require one to repeat the word "ale" twenty times and add one "mute" at the end.

These limitations are all part of toki pona's philosophy of simplifying thought and avoiding unnecessary detail. Some people have tried coming up with other numeral systems, but none have found widespread acceptance.

Using numerals

Regardless of the specific system, numerals are treated as adjectives and added at the end of nouns or noun phrases:

soweli wan – one animal

waso lili tu – two small birds

For ordinal numbers (first, second...), the word "nanpa" followed by the number is used.

jan nanpa wan – first person

tomo nanpa mute luka luka wan – 31st house (or house #31)

The phrase "nanpa wan" is sometimes used along with adjectives as a superlative modifier:

nena (Ewelesu/Somolunma) li nena suli nanpa wan lon ma ale. – Mount (Everest/Chomolungma) is the largest mountain in the whole world.

The calendar

In combination with "tenpo", the words "suno", "mun" and "sike" are commonly used to describe periods of time:

tenpo suno – day (“sun time”)

tenpo pimeja – night (“dark time”)

tenpo mun / tenpo sike mun – month (“moon time / moon cycle”)

tenpo sike / tenpo suno sike – year (“circle time / sun circle time”).

nanpa

In addition to being used for ordinal numerals, the word “nanpa” itself can mean “number” or “digit”. For example,

ilo nanpa – calculator (“number device”)

nanpa pona – score/points (“good numbers”)

Of course, one has to be careful then, because using actual numerals in this case would be confusing. For example, would “ilo nanpa tu” mean “second tool” or “two calculators”? In the latter example, reshuffling the words into “ilo tu nanpa” could work.

Weather

When talking about weather, the commonly used sentence is “[noun] li lon”, which literally means “[noun] exists” and translates to “It is [noun]y”. Examples:

suno li lon. – It is sunny.

telo sewi li lon. – It is rainy. (“Sky water” exists.)

seli li lon. – It is warm.

lete li lon. – It is cold.

Dialectal differences

This part of the document describes how certain toki pona courses differ in explaining certain ideas, or how communities differ in using them.

Different courses differ on how to write ordinal numbers.

The official book and the “12 days of sona pi toki pona” videos suggest simply adding “nanpa”, followed by the number, while the “o kama sona e toki pona!” course suggested adding “pi nanpa” and the number.

jan nanpa wan – first person

jan pi nanpa wan – first person

In the community, the former way seems slightly more widespread, so this course will follow its example.

Exercises

Now, try to figure out the meaning of these sentences.

- mi wile esun e soweli suli tu wan ni.
- tenpo suno pini la mi lon tomo sona.
- tenpo mun wan pini la lete li lon.
- sina pona nanpa wan tawa mi.
- tenpo suno mute mute la telo sewi li awen.

And try to translate the following sentences into toki pona.

- I live in house #27 on Washington Street.
- The TV (“device of moving pictures”) said tomorrow will be sunny.
- It will be cold tonight.
- May (“the 5th month”) is lovely.
- You have a lot of musical instruments!

PAGE 12:

The vocabulary for this page:

word	meaning
akesi	“non-cute” animal, lizard
alasa	to hunt, to gather, to seek, to try (doing something)
kon	air, essence, spirit, ephemeral
pan	bread, grain, corn, rice, pizza
pilin	heart, feeling, touch, sense
pu	the official toki pona book, interacting with it
supa	horizontal surface
taso	but, however, only
uta	mouth, lips

weka	absent, away, remote, get rid of
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These are the final 10 official words in toki pona. They all function in the same way as other words mentioned before, with one exception.

alasa

The word “alasa” is sometimes used as a pre-verb meaning “to seek” or “to try”:

mi alasa sona e toki pona. – I’m trying to learn toki pona.

taso

The word “taso” can be used as a regular adjective to mean “only” or “just”:

mi lon tomo ni. – I’m in this house.

mi taso li lon tomo ni. – Only I’m in this house.

kulupu ona li jo e jan tu taso. – Their community only has two people.

mi pali taso. – I was only working.

But, when added at the beginning of a sentence, it means “but” or “however”:

taso, tenpo kama li wile ala ante. – But, the future refused to change.

Dialectal differences

This part of the document describes how certain toki pona courses differ in explaining certain ideas, or how communities differ in using them.

In the official dictionary, “pu” is only defined as “interacting with the official Toki Pona book”. Usage of this word as “the official Toki Pona book” itself, while common among some users, is unofficial. Sonja Lang personally uses the noun phrase “lipu pu” to refer to the official book itself. (Though the phrase “pu la” is also used in the book to mean “in this book”).

Exercises

Now, try to figure out the meaning of these sentences.

- sina wile kama sona e toki pona la pu li nasin pona nanpa wan tawa ni.
- tenpo suno ni la mi pilin pona mute.
- sina wile ala wile moku e pan sike?

- supa lape mi li pakala. mi ken ala lape tan ni.
- jan Mali Konto li toki e ni: o weka e ijo ike sina.
- kulupu ijo tu wan li lon. ona li kulupu kiwen, li kulupu telo, li kulupu kon.
- taso, meli lili pi jan lawa li lon tomo awen ante.

And try to translate the following sentences into toki pona.

- I saw a dragon (“big green fire lizard”)!
- Hello! How are you? (“How do you feel?”)
- The hunter gave us lots of meat and fruit.
- I’m reading a document. Very soon (in a short time), it will end.
- I can speak toki pona very well.

[Answers](#)

That’s it!

And that’s the end of the toki pona course! We’ve covered all 120 official words and all the rules of the language. If you want to find out more or to try using toki pona with others, feel free to check out the extra pages or the list of resources on the bottom of the [top page](#).

~ jan Lentan (/dev/urandom)