

An introduction to Toki Pona

The minimalist constructed language with only 137 words



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Toki Pona

speak good

- Created by Sonja Lang
- ISO 639-3, identifier: “tok”
- first published in 2001
- official website: tokipona.org
- philosophical constructed language
- ~120-140 words (137 *nimi ku suli*)
- goal: mental clarity and positive thinking through minimalism

Sonja Lang

jan Sonja, mama pi toki pona

*1978 Moncton, Canada

- hyperpolyglot 7+ languages
- active in the Esperanto community
- translation, corpus research on Singaporean Malay

Communities - kulupu

Reddit

- (r/tokipona) — 28,000 member

Discord

- (ma pona pi toki pona) — 16.536 members
- (kama sona) — 7,588 members

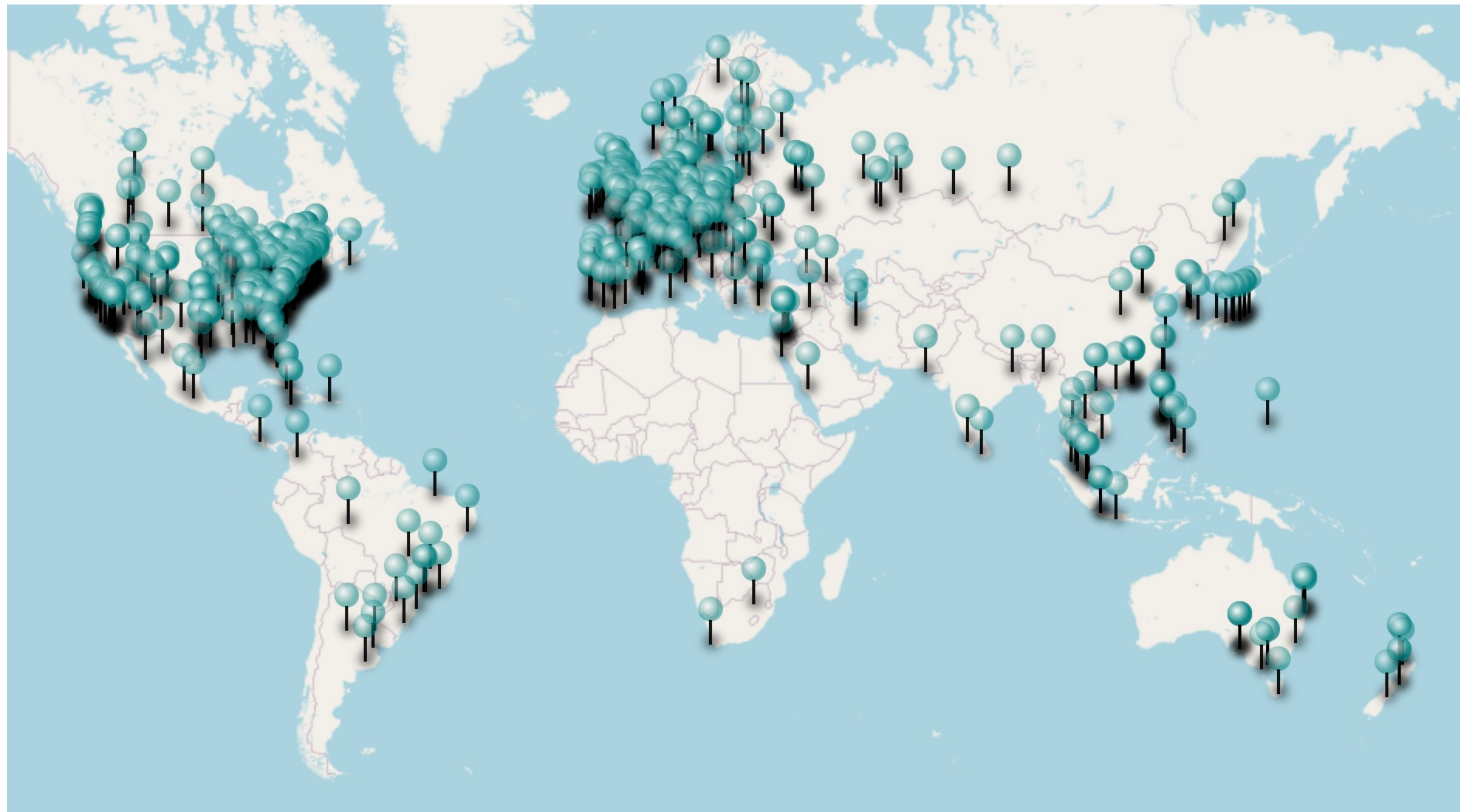
Facebook

- (toki pona) — 7,400 members

Largest in-person gathering 2024 in Berlin: 45 attendees

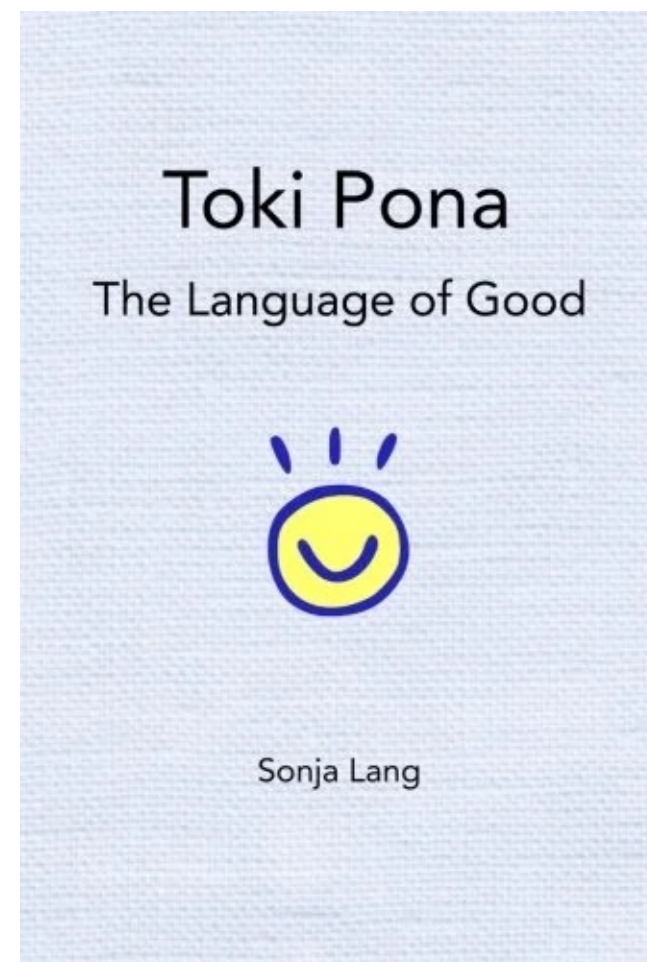
Toki Pona speakers around the world

ma.pona.la

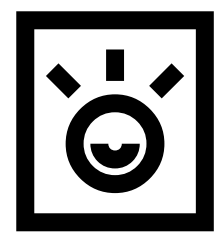


Sonja Lang's works on Toki Pona

2014

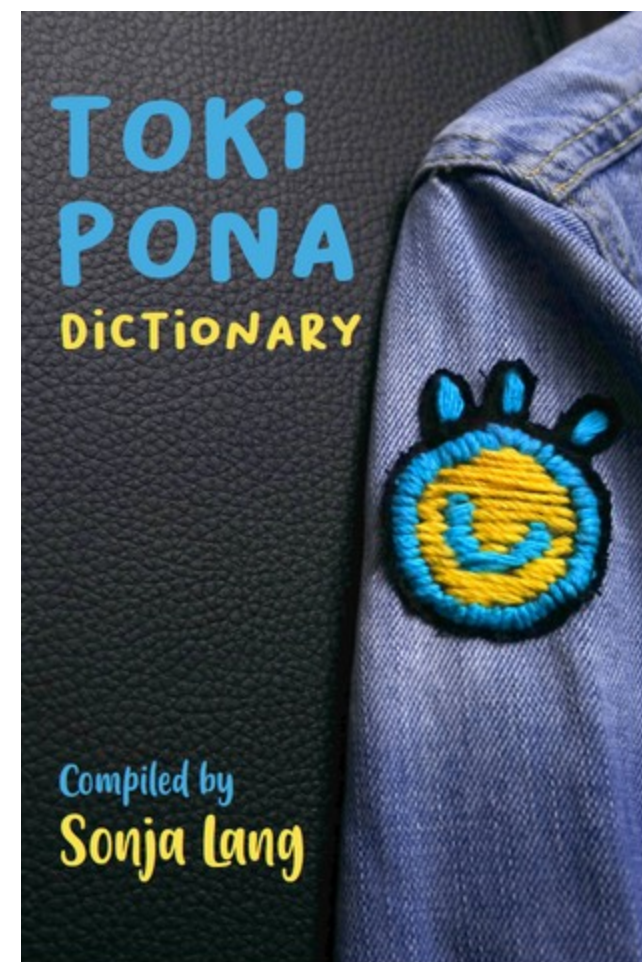


pu

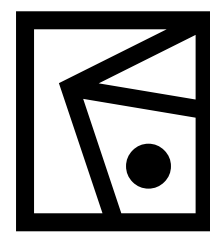


120 words
+ 3 synonyms

2021

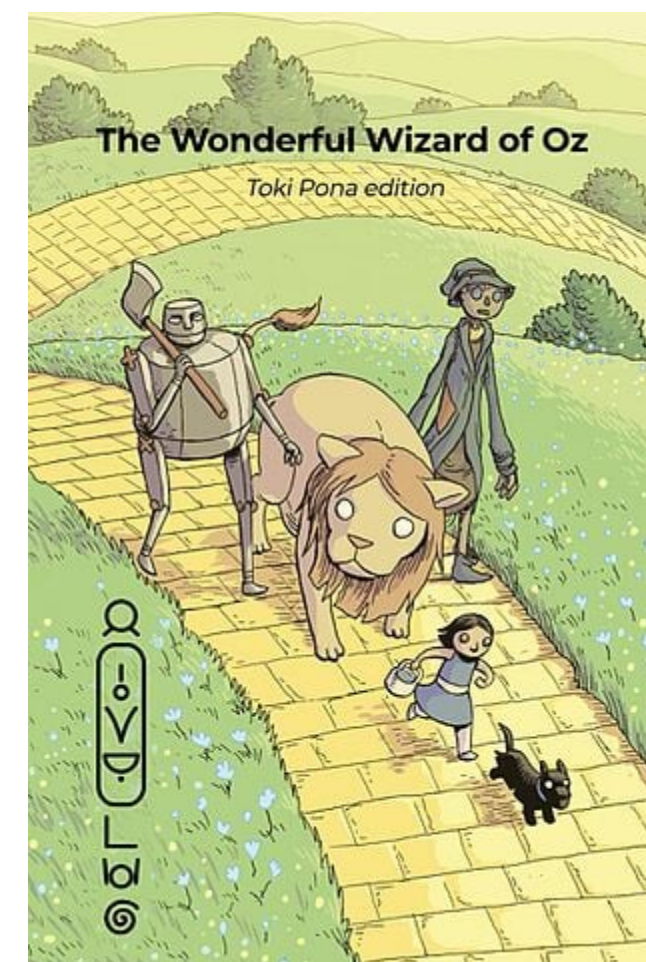


ku

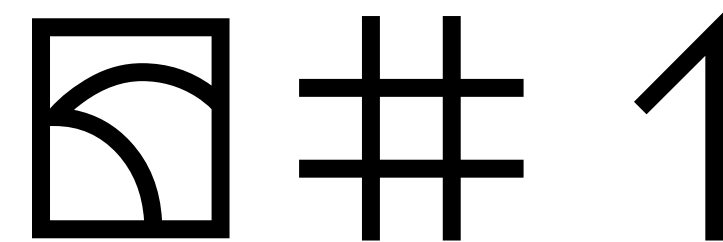


137 “important”
(*nimi ku suli*)

2024

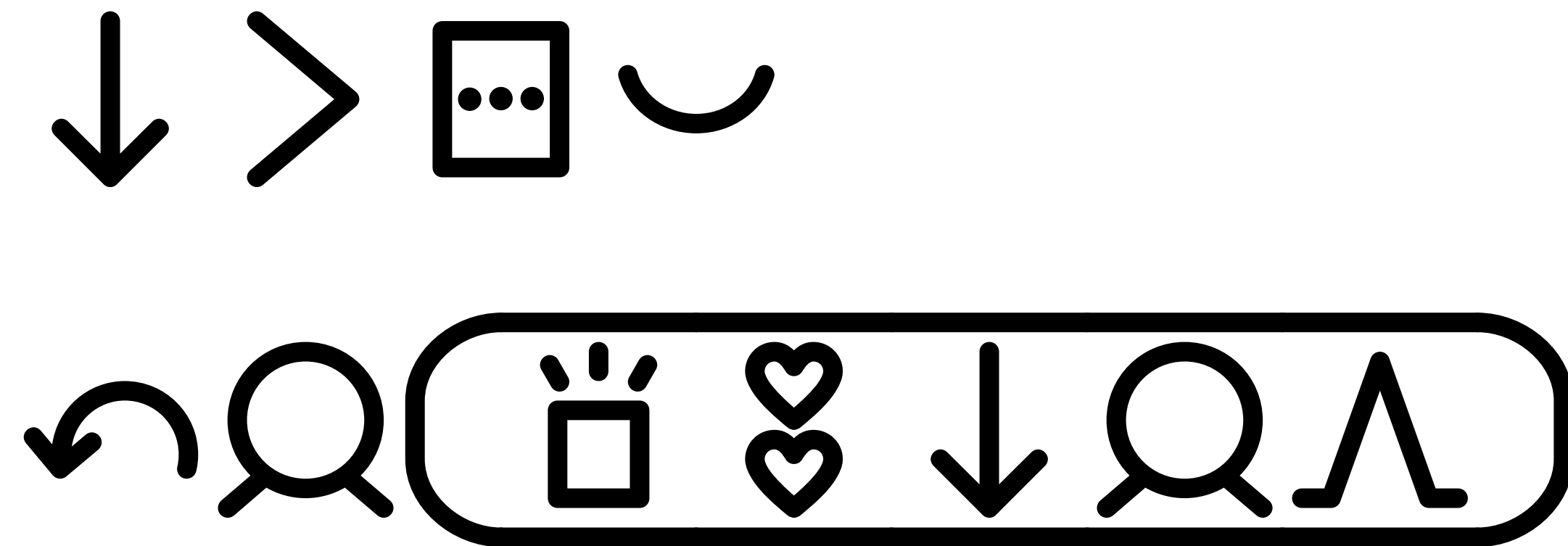


su nanpa wan

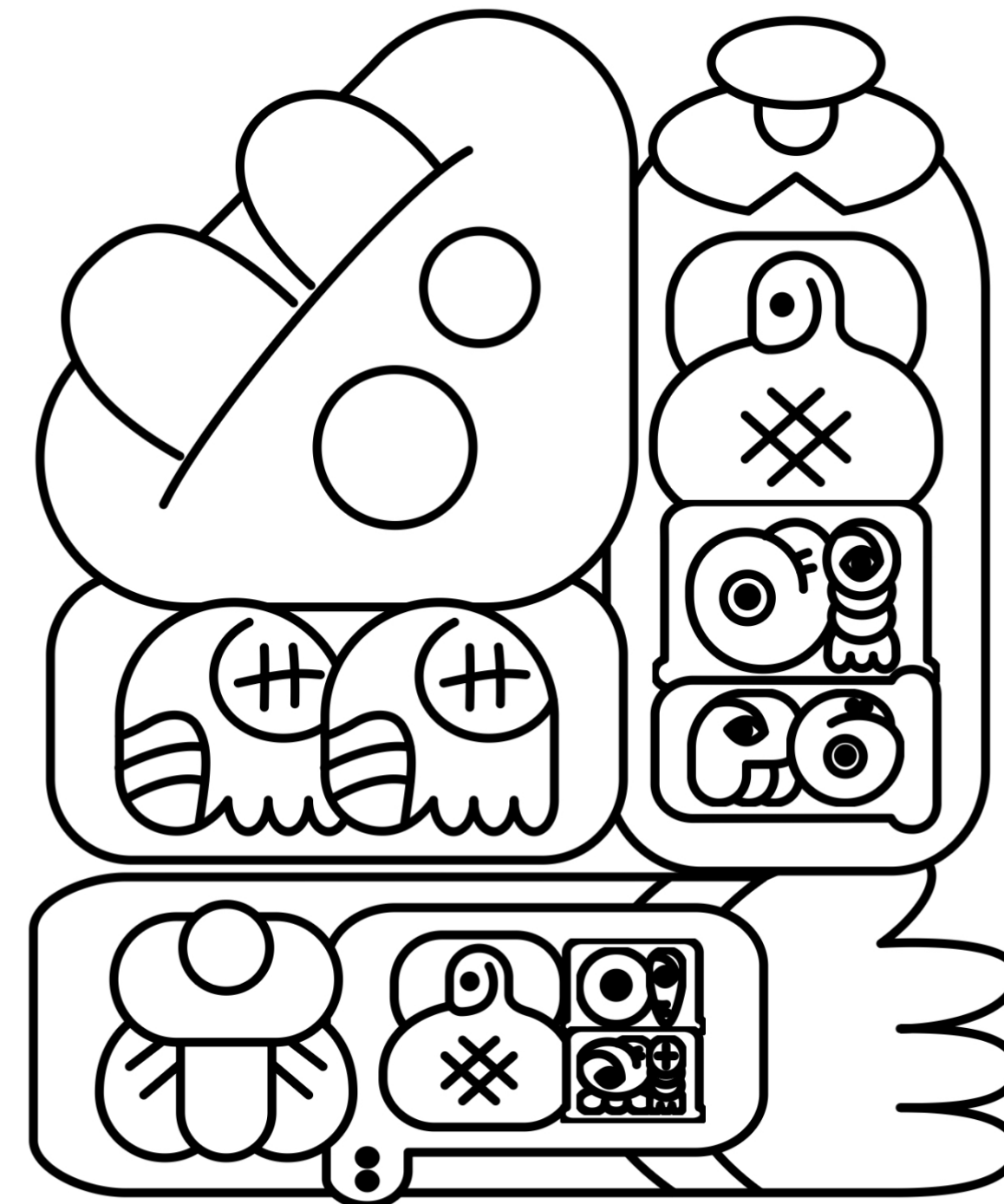


Writing Systems - nasin sitelen

This is *sitelen pona*,
created by Sonja Lang:



This is *sitelen sitelen* invented by
Jonathan Gabel made with Olaf
Janssen's sitelen-sitelen-generator:



Ressources

lipu

- Dictionary linku.la created by kala Asi
- [Reference grammar](#) by jan Juli
- [o pilin e toki pona](#) - immersive video course by jan Telakoman
- wasona.com new crash course by kala Asi (2025)
- more on tokipona.org

Art and Literature

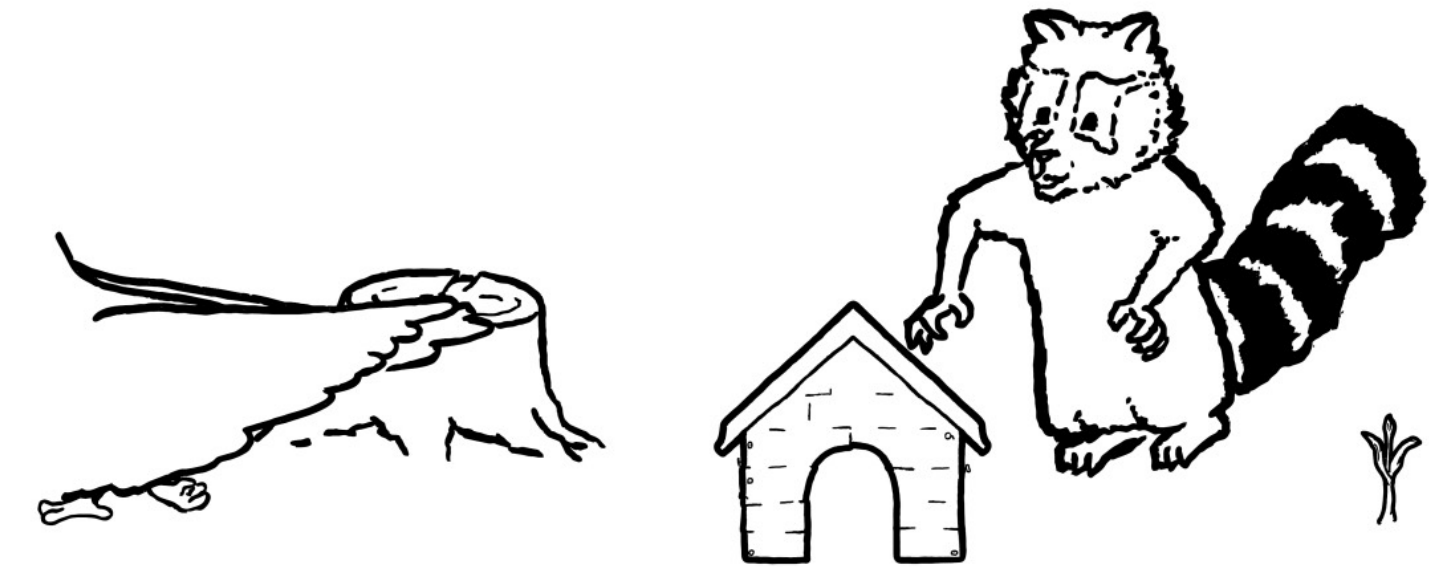
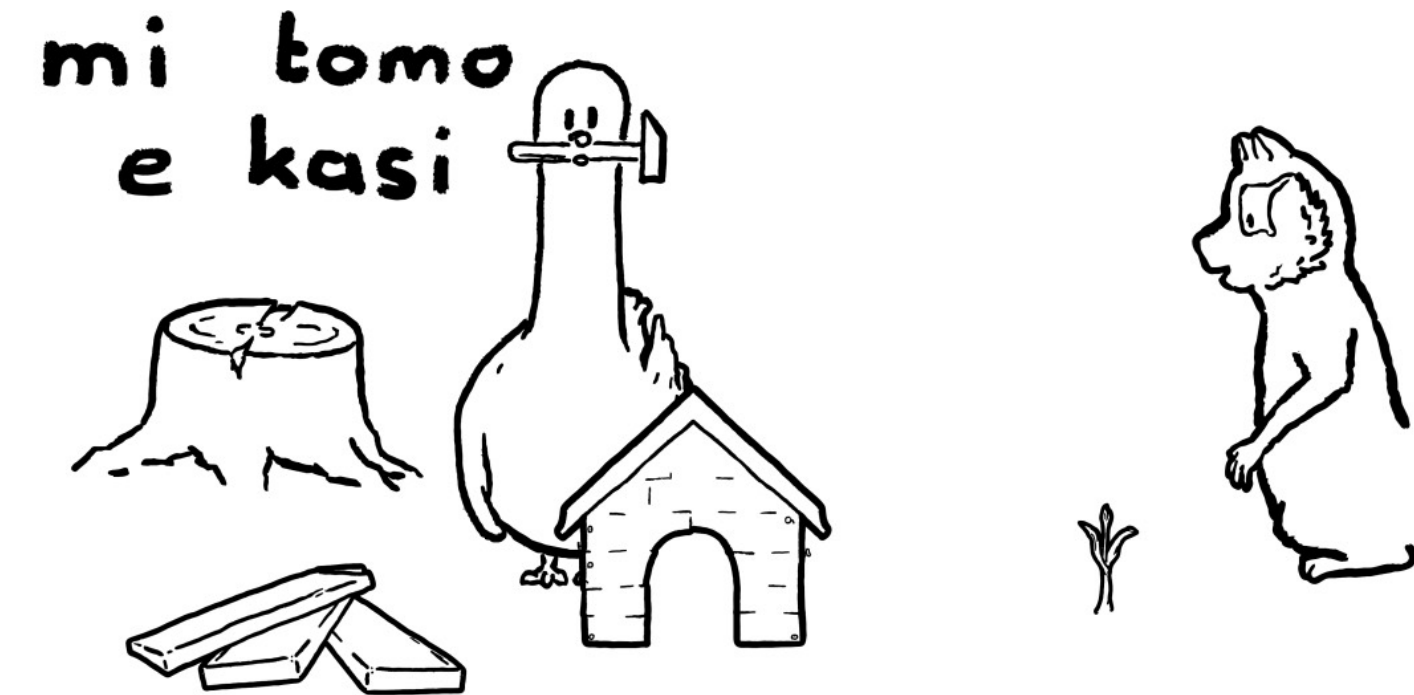
musi

original songs: e.g.

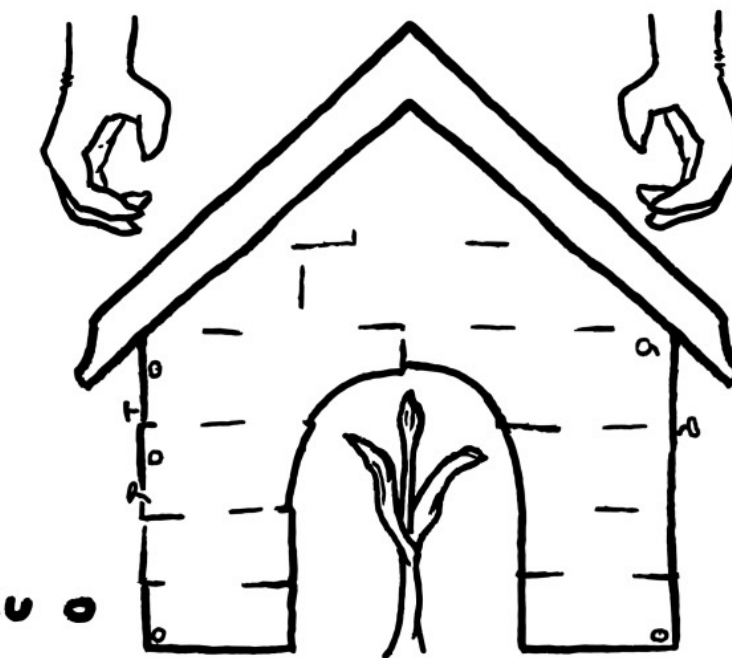
- jan Usawi
- kqa
- jan Sepulon

literature, comics and magazines: e.g.

- utala.pona.la
 - art and writing contest
- liputenpo.org - zine
 - articles, riddles, poetry, comics



mi tomo e kasi



kijetesuntakalu o

tan jan
Ke Tami

Samys (2024)

Luka Pona Sign Language (LPSL)

luka pona

- Sign language with features of toki pona that came to existence in 2020
- taught mostly in Toki Pona
- similar vocabulary
- grammar differences
- use of signing space

1) LPSL

SOWELI	PAN	MOKU
mammal	grain	eat

2) Toki Pona

soweli	li	moku	e	pan
mammal	PM	eat	OM	grain

Phonology

	labial	coronal	dorsal
nasals	m	n	
plosives	p	t	k
fricatives		s	
approximants	w	l	j

i	u
e [e̞]	o [o̞]
a [ä]	

- syllable structure: (C)V(n)
- */wu/, */wo/, */ji/, */ti/ */NN/ *VV
- stress on the first syllable

The Predicate Marker

li introduces the predicate:

(1) **kala** **li** **kala.**

fish PM fish

‘A fish is a sea creature.’

‘The sea creature was a fish.’

‘Fish will be fish.’

(2) **ona** **li** **suli.**

3 PM big

‘He/she is tall.’

‘It is big.’

‘They are important.’

(3) **ni** **li** **toki.**

DEM PM speak

‘This is a language.’

‘These are languages.’

‘This (one) talks.’

However it doesn’t appear before the participant pronouns *mi* and *sina*:

mi toki.

‘I/we speak.’

sina suli.

‘You are big/tall/important.’

The Object Marker

The object marker is a particle that precedes the object.

(4) **akesi li moku e kasi**
reptile PM eat OM plant
e.g. 'The lizard eats the flower'

(5) **moku li pona e ijo**
eat PM good OM being/thing
e.g. 'Food makes things better.'
e.g. 'Eating makes beings healthy.'

Exercise 1 - S li V (e O)

pronouns

mi	𐀓	1
sina	𐀔	2
ona	𐀕	3
ni	↓	DEM

adjectives-1

pona	𐀖	good, helpful, peaceful
ike	𐀗	bad, harmful, unneeded
lili	𐀘	small, short, young
suli	𐀙	big, heavy, tall, important

verbs

moku	𐀚	eat, drink, consume, food
jo	𐀛	hold, carry, possess, contain,
lape	𐀜	sleep, rest
pali	𐀝	work, build, put effort toward
pana	𐀞	give, send, emit, provide
toki	𐀟	communicate, think, story, language
kalama	𐀠	to produce sound, sound, sing

living beings, flora, fauna, humans

ijo	𐀡	being, entity
akesi	𐀢	reptile, amphibian, scaly creature
kala	𐀣	fish, sea creature, swimming creature
pipi	𐀤	insect, bug, spider
soweli	𐀥	fuzzy creature, land animal, beast
waso	𐀦	bird, flying creature, winged animal
jan	𐀧	human being, person, somebody
kasi	𐀨	plant, vegetation, herb, leaf
kili	𐀩	fruit, vegetable, mushroom
pan	𐀪	grains, starchy foods, baked goods

Modifiers

Modifiers follow the head-noun.

(6) adjectival modifier

luka **suli**
arm big
'big hand'

(7) compound noun

lipu **sona**
document knowledge
'knowledge-document'
e.g. 'encyclopedia'

(8) possessive modifier

a. **uta** **kala**
mouth fish
'mouth of a fish'

b. **mama** **mi**
parent 1
'my parent'

Modifiers

Nouns, verbs and adjectives can be modified. Here is an example of a modified NP:

- (9) [[[**tomo** **moku**] **suli**] **mi**]
 [[[building food] big] 1]
 my big food-building'

When a modifier consists of more than one word, the particle *pi* is placed before it.

- (10) [[[**sitelen kasi**] **suli**]
 [[[picture plant] big]
 'big plant-picture'

- (11) [**sitelen** [**pi** [**kasi suli**]]]
 [picture [pi [plant big]]]
 'picture of a big plant'

Exercise 2

adjectives

pona	☺	good, helpful, peaceful
ike	☹	bad, harmful, unneeded
lili	☹	small, short, young
suli	☺	big, heavy, tall, important
seli	🔥	hot, warm, (heat, fire)
lete	❄	cold, cool, frozen, chill, raw
ante	✕	different, altered
jaki	🦠	disgusting, unclean, toxic, rotten
pakala	💥	damaged, broken, (break)
nasa	🌀	strange, unusual, intoxicated

colors

jelo	☼	yellow
loje	☹	red
laso	☹	blue, green
pimeja	⬛	black, dark
walo	⬜	white, light
kule	⚙	color, pigment, category, flavor, colorful, diverse

use linku.la

1. kili loje lete
2. pan pi jelo walo
3. akesi seli lili
4. moku pi jaki suli
5. waso pi kule ante
6. soweli pi ma lete

Negation

The word *ala* (not, nothing, no, zero) can negate a phrase.

(12) **mi sona e [lipu *ala*]**

1 knowledge OM document NEG

‘I know no document’

‘We don’t know any book’

(13) **waso li [moku *ala*] e pan**

1 PM knowledge NEG OM bread

‘The birds don’t search for bread.’

Numbers

numbers, counting

ala	×	not, nothing, no, zero
wan	1	one, singular, combine, join, mix, fuse
tu		two, separate, divide, split
mute		many, several, very, quantity
nanpa	≠	number, [ordinal number]
kulupu	⊙	group, community, society, collection

(14) ordinal number:

soweli nanpa wan

‘the first animal’

Questions

Yes-No Questions are built in two ways:

1. S li V **ala** V (e O)?

2. S li V (e O), **anu seme**?

Answer

Yes: repeat the verb

No: *ala/V ala*

‘Which person?’

(15) a. **mama li kute ala kute e kalama?**
parent PM listen NEG listen OM sound
‘Did the parent listen to the sound?’

b. **mama li kute e kalama anu seme?**
parent PM listen OM sound or what
Did the parent listen to the sound?’

(16) a. **(kute) ala**
listen NEG
No.

b. **kute**
listen
Yes.

Exercise 3 - body parts and questions

body parts

lawa	☉	head, mind, brain
uta	☶	mouth, lips, throat
nena	∩	nose
noka	⌚	foot, organ of locomotion
luka	↷	hand, arm, tactile limb
lukin	👁	eye, seeing organ,
kute	👂	ear, hearing organ
pilin	♥	heart, feeling, touch
linja	∞	hair, fur
sijelo	⌚	body, torso, shape

colors

jelo	☼	yellow
loje	☠	red
laso	☼	blue, green
pimeja	⬛	black, dark
walo	⬜	white, light

other

len	👕	cloth, clothing
taso	†	only, but

Q: sina jo ala jo e
[body part] wan taso?

A: jo/ala.

Q: [body part] sina li
kule seme?

Q: len [body part] sina
li kule seme?

A: ona li [kule]

Prepositions

(17) ona li moku e telo kasi **lon** tomo moku.

(18) mi **tawa** tomo **tan** ma kasi **lon** suno ni **kepeken** noka **sama** soweli wawa.

prepositions

kepeken	𐀓	using, by means of	
lon	𐀂	located at, in, during, in the context of	present, existing, real, true
sama	=	similar to, same as	same, similar, alike, peer, fellow, each other
tan	↪	from, because of	cause, origin
tawa	𐀇	to, for, going to, from the perspective of	motion, e.g. walking, shaking, flight, travel

Prepositions as verbs

mi tawa sina e moku.

‘I’m to-you-ing the food’

jan li lon e tomo.

‘the person brings the house into
existence’

P△□
mi tawa
tomo



P△>>□
mi tawa
e
tomo



Donniac (2024)

Exercise 4 - tenpo en ma

sewi	𐀮	up, top, above, highest part, divine, sacred
anpa	𐀶	bottom, underside, below, beneath
insa	𐀺	inside, center, between, middle, midpoint, internal
sinpin	𐀾	front of something, vertical surface, wall, board
monsi	𐀻	back, behind
poka	𐀽	side, next to, nearby, vicinity
pini	𐀿	finish, stop, close, end
kama	𐁀	arriving, coming, future, summoned

preposition

kepeken	𐁁
lon	𐁂
sama	𐁃
tan	𐁄
tawa	𐁅

1. The picture is on the wall above the table.
2. The monkey jumps down from the tree.
3. The entrance is behind this building.
4. I entered the building.
5. He was good at Mathematics in the past.

context phrases - la

- The particle *la* can join two sentences. The first sentence serves as context for the second sentence:

(19) tenpo kama **la** waso li mama.

‘The bird will be a parent.’

(20) mi **la** kili laso li jaki!

‘According to me, green fruits are yucky!’

(21) soweli li lape **la** ona li wawa lon suno poka kama.

‘If/when the land animal sleeps, it will be powerful the next day.’

Vocative/Imperative/Voluntative - o

- The particle o is used to express commands, wants and needs. It can also be used to call and directly address people.

(22) o pona e toki sina!

(23) toki, jan Anki o!

(24) jan Anki o weka e luka sina tan lipu!

Preverbs

alasa	↗	try to
lukin	👁	try to
awen	∧	continue to
kama	∟	to become, manage to, succeed in
ken	K	to be able to
sona	☞	know how to
wile	ω	want to
open	⊢	begin, start
pini	I	finish, stop, prevent

Preverbs often carry modal or aspectual information.

(25) mi **alasa** tawa sewi sama waso.

(26) ona li **ken** toki Kanse.

(27) soweli li **sona** open e kili.

(25) sina **kama** sona e toki pona.

Exercise 5 - nimi sina

- toki! mi jan Neli. kalama musi li pona tawa mi.
- nimi sina li seme?
- seme li pona tawa sina?

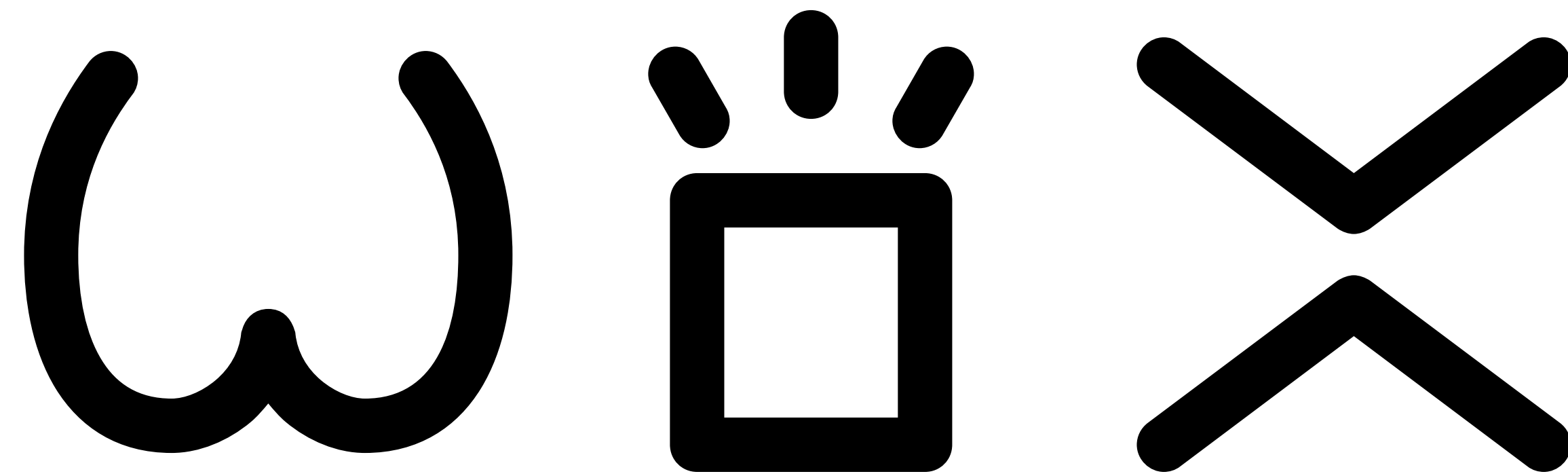
- syllable structure: (C)V(n)
- */wu/, */wo/, */ji/, */ti/ */NN/ *VV
- stress on the first syllable

m	n	
p	t	k
	s	
w	l	j

i	u
e [e̞]	o [o̞]
a [ä]	

lipu

- Asi, kala (2022). lipu Linku. linku.la (access: 2025-05-15)
- Donniac (2024). *Visual aid (tok) - mi tawa tomo (sitelen pona and Latin).jpg*. 2024. [https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Visual aid \(tok\) -
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2024/09/30/kijetesantakalu-o-nanpa-mute/](https://janketami.wordpress.com/2024/09/30/kijetesantakalu-o-nanpa-mute/) (access: 2025-05-15)



wile sona ante

ʀ I • Λ ∪ !

mi pini. tawa pona!