𑁋 ⚬ 𑀅 𑀓 !

o kama pona a tawa sitelen leko!
Welcome to sitelen leko!

What is sitelen leko?

Sitelen leko is a script I designed originally for a separate project that happened to work somewhat similarly to toki pona. After putting the project on Hiatus I decided to repurpose the script for toki pona. Why would I do this and not just use sitelen pona? Well, unfortunately I've never been a huge fan of sitelen pona both functionally and aesthetically. Before you pull out your pitchforks, just know that I concede two things: Aesthetically, sitelen pona is very cute, just not my cup of tea. And when I say "functionally" I'm not suggesting sitelen pona doesn't function well, it does - very well. To understand what I mean you have to understand my goals when adapting this script…

What were my goals when adapting?

I have always had reasons for being dissatisfied with sitelen pona and for many years have tried to develop various other ways to write toki pona. Eventually, I learned to use and read sitelen pona so I could understand where it shines (and it does shine very brightly) and where it falls short. That being said, there were two large goals to tackle: Ambiguity and Legibility. What do I mean when I say these were my goals?

Ambiguity:
Toki pona is naturally an ambiguous language and that is OKAY. I have no problem with this in general, but what if there was a way to eliminate SOME ambiguity without changing the way the language functions at all? What if when writing (the primary way users consume material for toki pona) there were intuitive visual clues that could terminate some of this ambiguity? This is a question I toyed with in many different ways with many different attempts to create a new writing system.

Legibility:
I consider toki pona to have three major categories for the syntactic role a word can play: Particles, Content words and (what I call) function words. What does this have to do with legibility? Well, let's take a detour to Japanese and try to understand where I'm coming from.

For those of you who have never studied Japanese or don't know much about the language, it has three writing systems, each with their own function for written communication.

First: Kanji! These are characters borrowed from Chinese which carry semantic meaning.
Second: Hiragana! A script native to Japan (derived from Kanji) that represents the language phonetically.
Last: Katakana! Similar in function to Hiragana but different in use.

There are distinct visual differences between these three scripts and along with these visual differences there are also functional differences. Kanji is used to derive semantic meaning and Hiragana carries much of the grammatical weight. Here is an example with Kanji in red and Hiragana in yellow; 私は食堂で魚を食べま. Hopefully it is noticeable

the visual differences here. Kanji tend to be more complex

with many straight and angled lines, while Hiragana tend to be simpler and often have more curvature to them. These visual queues can quickly tell the reader (even novice learners) where semantic meaning ends and grammar begins.

This is something I wanted to achieve with toki pona as well. I wanted visual queues that could quickly tell the reader what part of toki pona's grammatical patterns they are looking at.

These goals of mine are things I tried to achieve in various ways through many different attempted scripts, but I kept being pulled back to the idea that the original script sitelen leko is adapted from would work perfectly. So eventually I caved in and took the leap to adapt it and officially create sitelen leko.

How to use sitelen leko

Sitelen leko is a block based system (similar to Korean) with each block containing up to three pieces: Two semantic halves and one grammatical marker (particles):

The top half of the block is (usually) the head noun/verb and the bottom half is (usually) an adjective/adverb. Here is an example: soweli lili

You'll notice that I said "usually" which means there are exceptions. But don't worry! The exceptions are intuitive.

So, when is the top block not a head noun or head verb? Well, when it's acting as an adjective for another head noun: soweli lili suwi mute
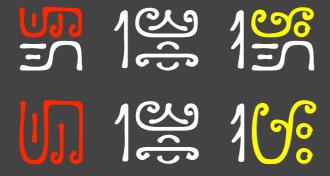
So when does the bottom half of the block not represent an adjective or adverb??? Well imagine an instance where I don't want to use an adjective or adverb. maybe I just want to say "soweli li lili." Well…

This somehow doesn't look right. They aren't blocks any longer, instead some uneven row of glyphs. Thats where

this special glyph ⊐∩ comes in handy. ⊐∩ has no

pronunciation. Its sole purpose is to be an "empty" adjective or adverb. so lets take a look at "soweli li lili" again, but using our new glyph.

Instead of adding this "empty" glyph, the writer can instead stretch the primary noun or verb to take up the whole space: soweli wile ala e kili

This method will be reserved for handwritten sitelen leko, as the font doesn't support any standardised version of these stretched glyphs. This means there is plenty of room for creativity when deciding how to stretch. Feel free to add to or change the glyphs in this form as long as it is recognisable.

Particles:
As mentioned before, particles are strictly grammatical in nature, so they aren't given the same visual space as content words. Instead, they are added to the side of the content block, taking up much less space. Here is an example: soweli li moku e kili

here is a list of all grammatical particles: li la e pi o

As can be seen above, the particles sit on the left side of the glyph they "modify," All except 'la,' which sits on the right side of the phrase it modifies: tenpo pini la soweli lili li moku

Function words:
What I consider function words are words that don't carry a lot of grammatical weight or a lot of semantic weight. Somewhere in between. These are words like 'kin,' 'taso,' and 'a'. These function words also have their own visual identity. Seeing as they are somewhere in between grammatical and semantic, they visually are somewhere in

between blocks and sticks. Here, take a look: soweli li wile moku taso ona li jo ala e moku pona

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Here is a list of what I consider a function words:
en anu taso kin a n

0 0 0 0 0 0

But wait! some of these function words can also be used as content words! How can we achieve this??? Well the solution is easy! just flip it on its side and use it as such!: soweli li wile moku taso ona li jo e kiwen taso

All function words can be flipped on their side and used as content words just in case you want to get experimental!
(But be careful, some of these may create unintended ambiguity due to slightly resembling other content words)

Additional rules:
A lot of what makes this sitelen special (in my opinion) is the ability to clear ambiguity in certain cases without changing the language. Sometimes the role content words play in a sentence can be slightly unclear, but there is a solution to this. Take this for example: o pana e soweli tawa mi. Most people would understand this to mean something like "give me the animal." But what if the writer didn't intend this

meaning, instead for some reason they wanted to say "release my moving animal!" Well let's look at this second interpretation first:

As you can see "tawa" is occupying the bottom half of the block, this defines it as an adjective for "soweli," thus we have the interpretation "my moving animal." But what about the more common interpretation? Well take a look here:

We can see here there is an intentional separation between "soweli" and "tawa" using ᒲᑎ. This helps to emphasise that "tawa" is working as a preposition. I want to take this moment to remind you that any time ᒲᑎ is used, the writer can INSTEAD omit ᒲᑎ and stretch the main glyph downwards, occupying all the space of the block.

Pronouns:
As we know, the pronouns "mi" and "sina" don't take "li." This manifests in an interesting way in sitelen leko. One block can be a whole sentence! here: mi moku

Of course we can even continue the sentence with other particles: mi moku e kili lili

There is one minor rule here however. When the verb/noun that follows "mi" or "sina" contains an adjective or adverb, then they should be separated from the pronoun completely:
mi soweli ala

   This is correct

   This is incorrect

Using lon:
The toki pona word "lon" is one that I personally struggled a lot with in my early days of learning toki pona, and a lot of the problems I had can be easily addressed using sitelen leko. Just like other prepositions, we can separate "lon" from

solo-head nouns using after the noun, and we can

define "lon" as an adjective by having it occupy the second half of the block:

. . . .soweli lon....   ...a real animal…

…e soweli lon tomo mi…   …an animal in my house…

Because the bottom half of the block is (almost) always reserved for adjectives or adverbs, "lon" should take the "empty" glyph when acting as a preposition for a place, just as seen above.

However, If "lon" is used to define other prepositions such as "insa," "sinpin," "anapa," then bottom half of the block will be occupied by the preposition, otherwise the preposition won't be interpreted as such, and instead as a content word: telo loje li tawa lon insa mi

Blood is flowing inside me

Blood is trickling down my guts

Spacing:
Because each category word has its own visual identity and words fit in blocks, spacing is not necessary. You can use spaces or not, its up to you. This doesn't change legibility:

Spacing (or lack there of) can even be used as a tool to group certain ideas together creating further connection/ boundaries: soweli lili li moku ala moku e telo jelo jaki anu kili lili laso?

And Finally:
Sitelen leko has a phonetic script that can be used along with the regular script to aide in communicating names and foreign words. Some people hopefully will find this useful, others may prefer the method sitelen pona uses, Im for the latter. I think sitelen pona's method for writing out names allows for some amazing creativity that I just can't duplicate here. Regardless, here is how that looks:

mi jan Kuwi li pilin pona tan ni: sina lukin e lipu ni ale. pona tawa sina!