



Peace Corps/ Botswana

An Introduction to the Setswana Language

Setswana is one of the Bantu language groups, mostly spoken in Botswana, South Africa and Namibia (Southern Africa). The following lessons have been designed to suit any new learner in Setswana who has had little or no exposure to Setswana language. Remember, Setswana will be a useful tool in your work, and aid you in integrating well in your community making accessible to you a substantial segment of the population with little or no English skills.

O amogetswe mo puong ya Setswana!! Pula!

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Lesson 1: A Guide to Pronunciation

Alphabet	Like	Example
a	a in <i>father</i>	<i>batho</i> , people
b	b in <i>baby</i>	<i>baba</i> , enemies
ch	ch in <i>church</i>	<i>chenchi</i> , <i>change</i>
d	<i>Debt</i>	<i>ditau</i> , lions
e (represents two sounds)	ey in "they" or "a" in <i>came</i> e in <i>begin</i>	<i>pele</i> , first <i>bina</i> , dance
ê	"e" in <i>there</i>	<i>êma</i> , stand
f	<i>far</i>	<i>fêla</i> , only
g	<i>The sound made when you hawk a lougie</i>	<i>gana</i> , refuse
h	<i>house</i>	<i>huma</i> , be rich
i	ee in <i>deep</i>	<i>bina</i> , dance
j	j in <i>jug</i>	<i>jwala</i> , sow
k	k in <i>kind</i>	<i>kima</i> , thick
l	l in <i>line</i>	<i>lela</i> , cry/ weep
m	m in <i>me</i>	<i>mena</i> , fold
n	n in <i>name</i>	<i>nama</i> , meat
o (represents two sounds)	o in <i>boat</i> A sound somewhat like u in <i>put</i>	<i>Motse</i> , village <i>Pelo</i> , heart
ô	ou in <i>ought</i>	<i>bôna</i> , see
p	p in <i>pain</i>	<i>pitse</i> , horse
ph	p (with aspiration) as in <i>peach</i>	<i>phutha</i> , fold
q	non existent	
r	You just roll the "r"	<i>rêra</i> , preach
s	s in <i>sit</i>	<i>simolola</i> , start
t	t in <i>steak</i>	<i>setoto</i> , carcass
th	t (with aspiration) as in <i>take</i>	<i>thusa</i> , help
tl	as in <i>cluck</i>	<i>tla</i> , come
tlh	(with aspiration) as in <i>sclerosis</i>	<i>tlhana</i> , wash/ bathe
tsh	(with aspiration) like ts in <i>mats</i>	<i>tshaba</i> , run away
u	u in <i>rude</i>	<i>pula</i> , rain
v	nonexistent	
w	w in <i>water</i>	<i>wêna</i> , you
x	an palatal click that is laterally released as in <i>nxe</i> , expressing sympathy	<i>Nxau-xau</i> , name of place in Botswana
y	y in <i>yet</i>	<i>tsamaya</i> , go
z	nonexistent	

Adapted from: Setswana- English- Setswana Dictionary(Z.I. Matumo, 1993)

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Lesson 2: Greetings

(Formal)- Dialogue	
dumêla rra	Good morning/ day/ evening sir
dumêla mma	Good morning/ day/ evening madam
o tsogile jang?	How are you?
ke tsogile sentle, wêna o tsogile jang? (tsogile- Lit. means how have you risen?)	I am fine and how are you?
Ke tsogile sentle	I am well
Greeting a group	
Dumêlang borra le bomma	Good day ladies and gentlemen
Dumela mma	Good day madam
Le tsogile jang?	How are you (pl)?
Re tsogile sentle, wêna o tsogile jang?	We are well and how are you?
Ke tsogile sentle	I am well
Re a leboga	Thank you
(Informal)- Dialogue	
Dumêla rra	Good day sir
Dumêla mma	Good day madam
Le kae?	How are you?
re teng a lona le teng?	I am fine and how are you?
Re teng	I am fine
“Dumêla” is not specific to any time of the day. Men are expected to take off their hats/ caps when greeting elders.	

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Lesson 3: Introducing Self/ Someone

leina lame ke Itumeleng	My name is Itumeleng
sefane same ke Moeng	My Last name is Moeng
leina la gago ke mang?	What is your name?
ke tswa kwa Botswana	I am from Botswana
o tswa kae?	Where are you from?
leina la gagwe ke Thabo	His name is Thabo
sefane sa gagwe ke Thuto	His last name is Thuto
a o tswa kwa Amerika?	Are you from America?
ke moithaopi	I am a volunteer

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Lesson 4: Leave- Taking Expression

<i>go siame</i>	Good-bye
<i>ke tla go bona</i>	See you
<i>tlhôla sentle</i>	Have a good day
<i>robala sentle / borôkô</i>	Good night
<i>ke tla go bôna kamoso</i>	See you tomorrow
<i>ke tla go bôna kgantele</i>	See you later

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Lesson 5: Vocabulary 1 (Verbs)

Go- <i>(word after slash represents the verb in its past tense form)</i>	To-
<i>kgôna / kgônnê</i>	Able, be
<i>gakolola / gakolotsê</i>	Advise;remind
<i>tshaba / tshabile</i>	Afraid of, be
<i>araba / arabile</i>	Answer
<i>gôrôga / gôrôgile</i>	Arrive
<i>botsa / boditse</i>	Ask
<i>kopa / kopile</i>	Ask for (polite way)
<i>tsamaya / tsamaile</i>	Away, go ; travel
<i>nna, ntse</i>	Be, become
<i>simolola / simolotse</i>	Begin
<i>dumêla / dumetse</i>	Believe, agree
<i>bedisa / bedisitse</i>	Boil
<i>adima / adimile</i>	Borrow
<i>tlisa / tlisitse)</i>	Bring
	Burn
<i>tshuba / tshubile</i>	
<i>fitlha / fitlhile</i>	Bury
<i>rêka / rêkile</i>	Buy
<i>bitsa / biditse</i>	Call another person
<i>kuka / kukile</i> (<i>lit. lift, when in its past form it means to help sb. carry</i>)	Carry
<i>palama / palame</i>	Climb
<i>tswala / tswetse</i>	Close
<i>tla / tlide,</i>	Come
<i>tsêna/ tsenye</i>	Come in
<i>tswa / dule,</i>	Come out (emerge)
<i>apaya / apeile</i>	Cook
<i>lela / ledile</i>	Cry
<i>bina / binnê</i>	Dance
<i>diêga / diêgile</i>	Delay
<i>senya / sentse</i>	Destroy

<i>dira / dirile</i>	Do
<i>nwa / nolê</i>	Drink
<i>phakêla / phaketse</i>	Early, to be
<i>ja / jele</i>	Eat
<i>tsêna / tsene</i>	Enter
<i>tlhalosa / tlhalositse</i>	Explain
<i>utlwa / utlwile</i>	Feel; Hear; Taste
<i>fetsa / feditse</i>	Finish
<i>fitlhêla / fitlhêtse</i>	Find
<i>baakanya / baakantsê</i>	Fix, prepare
<i>itshwarêla / itshwarêtse</i>	Forgive
<i>bôna / bonye</i>	To see
<i>tsoga / tsogile</i>	Get up/ wake up
<i>fa / file</i>	Give
<i>ya / ile</i>	Go
<i>itumêla / itumêtse</i>	Happy, be
<i>thusa / thusitse</i>	Help
<i>tshwara / tshwere</i>	Hold
<i>bolaya / bolaille</i>	Injure
<i>boloka / bolokile</i>	Keep
<i>siama / siame</i>	Kind, be
<i>itse / itsile</i>	Know
<i>tshêga / tshegile</i>	Laugh
<i>ithuta / ithutile</i>	Learn ; study
<i>reetsa / reeditse</i>	Listen
<i>rata / ratile</i>	Like/ love
<i>nna / ntse</i>	Live
<i>tlhôka / tlhôkile</i>	Need
<i>bula / butsê</i>	Open
<i>feta / fetile</i>	Pass
<i>duêla/ duetse</i>	Pay
<i>sêla / setse</i>	Pick up
<i>baya / beile</i>	Place; put
<i>gana / gannê</i>	Refuse
<i>boa / boile</i>	Return
<i>raya / reile</i>	Say
<i>rekisa / rekisitse</i>	Sell
<i>lwala / lwetse</i>	Sick, to be
<i>nna-fatshe / ntse-fatshe</i>	Sit down
<i>robala / robetse</i>	Sleep
<i>gôga / gogile</i>	Smoke ; pull
<i>bua / buile</i>	Speak
<i>lala / letse</i>	Spend the night
<i>sala / setse</i>	Stay behind
<i>tsaya / tsere</i>	Take

<i>ruta / rutile</i>	Teach
<i>bolêla / boletse</i>	Tell
<i>lapa / lapile</i>	Tired, become
<i>leka / lekile</i>	Try
<i>tlhaloganya / tlhalogantse</i>	Understand
<i>dirisa / dirisitse</i>	Use
<i>êta / êtela</i>	Visit
<i>batla / batlile</i>	Want
<i>Tlhatswa ; tlhatswitse</i>	Wash (clothes)
<i>Tlhapa ; tlhapile</i>	bathe
<i>leba / lebile</i>	Watch
<i>bêrêka / berekile</i>	Work
<i>kwala / kwadile</i>	Write

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Lesson 6: Some Useful Expressions

<i>ke lapile</i>	I am tired
<i>ke a otsêla</i>	I am sleepy
<i>ke tshwerwe ke tlala</i>	I am hungry
<i>ga ke a tshwarwa ke tlala</i>	I am not hungry
<i>o ya kae?</i>	Where are you going?
<i>ke ya lapeng</i>	I am going home
<i>o tla leng?</i>	When are you coming?
<i>o nna kae?</i>	Where is your home?
<i>Andrew o kae?</i>	Where is Andrew?
<i>Edward o ya posong</i>	Edward is going to the post office
<i>ga ke ye shopong</i>	I don't go to the shop
<i>ke ithuta Setswana</i>	I am learning Setswana ; I study
<i>ga ke rate kofi</i>	I don't take coffee
<i>ke batla go ikhutsa</i>	I need some rest
<i>ke a ja</i>	I eat ; I am eating
<i>ga a je</i>	He doesn't eat
<i>ga a ithute</i>	She doesn't study
<i>ke tlhapa phakela</i>	I bathe in the morning
<i>ke tsoga makuku</i>	I wake up very early
<i>go nna bosigo</i>	It's becoming late (night fall)
<i>nako e tsamaile; ...e tshaile (inf.)</i>	It's time up
<i>Ke tshwere ke lenyora</i>	I am thirsty
<i>ga ke tlhaloganye</i>	I don't understand
<i>Bua ka bonya</i>	Speak slowly
<i>gape</i>	Again
<i>intshwarele</i>	Excuse me
<i>Bua ka bonako</i>	Speak quickly
<i>A o na le mathata?</i>	Do you have a problem (s)?
<i>Ee ke na le mathata</i>	Yes, I have a problem

<i>Nnyaa, ga ke na mathata</i>	No, I don't have a problem
<i>A o na le dipotso?</i>	Do you have any questions?
<i>reetsa</i>	Listen
<i>botsa</i>	Ask
<i>dumêdisa</i>	Greet
<i>Tswêê-tswêê</i>	Please
<i>Ke itumetse</i>	Thank you

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Lesson 7: Vocabulary 2 (Nouns)

Kitchen	
<i>tafole</i>	Table
<i>setilô</i>	Chair
<i>sejana</i>	Plate
<i>kopi</i>	Cup
<i>leswana</i>	Spoon
<i>thipa</i>	Knife
<i>lefêêlô</i>	Broom
Bedroom	
<i>bolao</i>	Bed
<i>kobô</i>	Blanket
<i>diaparô</i>	Clothes
<i>borokgwe</i>	Pants
<i>ditlhako</i>	Shoes
General items	
<i>pensele</i>	Pencil
<i>buka</i>	Book
<i>bêkê</i>	Bag
<i>pênê</i>	Pen
<i>fensetere</i>	Window
<i>lebatî</i>	Door

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Lesson 8: Pronouns

<i>nna</i>	I
<i>wêna</i>	You
<i>ênenê</i>	She/ he
<i>rona</i>	We/ us
<i>lona</i>	You (pl)
<i>bônê</i>	Them

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Lesson 9: Connecting words

le	and
mme	But
Kgotsa/kana	Or
ke	Is
jaaka	As/like
Ka jalo	therefore
Ka gore	because

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Lesson 10: Negation

	I	You (sing)	She/ he	We	You (pl)	They
Present	<i>Ke a batla</i>	<i>O a batla</i>	<i>O a batla</i>	<i>Re a batla</i>	<i>Le a batla</i>	<i>Ba a batla</i>
	<i>I want</i>	<i>You want</i>	<i>She/he wants</i>	<i>We want</i>	<i>You want</i>	<i>They want</i>
Negative present	<i>Ga ke batle</i>	<i>Ga o batle</i>	<i>Ga a batle</i>	<i>Ga re batle</i>	<i>Ga le batle</i>	<i>Ga ba batle</i>
	<i>I do not want</i>	<i>You do not want</i>	<i>She/he not want</i>	<i>We do not want</i>	<i>You do not want</i>	<i>They do not want</i>
Past	<i>Ke ne ke batla</i>	<i>O ne o batla</i>	<i>O ne a batla</i>	<i>Re ne re batla</i>	<i>Le ne le batla</i>	<i>Ba ne ba batla</i>
	<i>I did want</i>	<i>You did want</i>	<i>She/he did want</i>	<i>We did want</i>	<i>You did want</i>	<i>They did want</i>
Negative past	<i>Ke ne ke sa batle</i>	<i>O ne o sa battle</i>	<i>O ne a sa battle</i>	<i>Re ne re sa batle</i>	<i>Le ne le sa batle</i>	<i>Ba ne ba sa batle</i>
	<i>I did not want</i>	<i>You did not want</i>	<i>She/he did not want</i>	<i>We did not want</i>	<i>You did not want</i>	<i>They did not want</i>
Negative future	<i>Ga ke kake ka batla</i>	<i>Ga o kake wa batla</i>	<i>Ga a kake a batla</i>	<i>Ga re kake ra batla</i>	<i>Ga le kake la batla</i>	<i>Ga ba kake ba batla</i>
	<i>I will not want</i>	<i>You will not want</i>	<i>She/he will not</i>	<i>We will not want</i>	<i>You will not want</i>	<i>They will not want</i>
Future	<i>Ke tlaa batla</i>	<i>O tlaa batla</i>	<i>O tlaa batla</i>	<i>Re tlaa batla</i>	<i>Le tlaa batla</i>	<i>Ba tlaa batla</i>
	<i>I will want</i>	<i>You will want</i>	<i>She/he will want</i>	<i>We will want</i>	<i>You will want</i>	<i>They will want</i>

- ✓ When you add the negative **ga** in the present statement the last letter in the verb changes to **e** (applicable in negative present tense).
- ✓ When you change the subject marker present “ke” to subject marker past the negative **ga** changes to **sa** i.e. negative past tense.
- ✓ In the negative future, the stem **ga + pronoun+ kake** is used to signify the negation.

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Lesson 11: Verb “to be” and “to have”

Verb to be (-nna)	
ke a bala	I am a reading
o a bala	You are (sing) reading
Lo a bala	You are (pl) reading
o a bala	She/ he is reading
Ba a bala	They are reading
Re a bala	We are reading
the ‘a’ is applicable in all pronouns to mean am,is are e.t.c.	
Verb to have (-na le)	
ke na le buka	I have a book
O na le buka	You have (sing) a book
Lo na le buka	You have (pl) a book
O na le buka	She/ he has a book
Ba na le buka	They have a book
Re na le buka	We have a book

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Lesson 12: Questions and Commands

Eng?	Ke eng?	What is it?
Leng?	O tsile leng?	When did you come?
Kae?	O tswa kae?	Where are you from?
Jang?	O tsogile jang?	How are you?
Mang?	O mang?	Who are you?
Efe?	O batla efe?	Which one?
dife ?	O batla dife?	Which ones?
reng ?	go reng/ ka go reng?	Why?
Commanding expressions		
bula lebati		Open the door
tswala lebati		Close the door
êma o buê		Stand and talk
êma ka dinao		Stand

<i>tsêna mo teng</i>	Get inside
<i>tlaa kwano</i>	Come here
<i>didimala/reetsa</i>	Keep quiet/Listen
<i>boela kwa morago</i>	Go back
<i>tlaa kwa pele</i>	Come to the front
<i>nna fatshe</i>	Sit down

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Lesson 13: Expressing Needs

<i>o batla eng?</i>	What do you want?
<i>ke batla kêrêsê</i>	I want a candle
<i>o tlhôka eng?</i>	What do you need?
<i>ke tlhoka madi</i>	I need money
<i>o batla go ya kae?</i>	Where do you want to go?
<i>ke batla go ya kwa lapeng</i>	I want to go home
<i>o batla go dira eng jaanong?</i>	What do you want to do now?
<i>ga ke itse</i>	I do not know
<i>o ikutlwang?</i>	How do you feel?
<i>tlhogo yame e santse e opa</i>	My head still aches
<i>ke eng a tlhoka madi a mantsi?</i>	Why does she need a lot of money?
<i>o tlhôka go reka dijo le diaparo</i>	She needs to buy food and clothes
<i>o rata kofi?</i>	Do you like coffee?
<i>nnyaa, ga ke rate kofi</i>	No. I don't like coffee
<i>o ya kae kamoso; kamoso o ya kae?</i>	Where are you going tomorrow?
<i>ke batla go ya shopong phakela</i>	I want to go to the shops in the morning

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Lesson 14: Food Items

<i>dijô</i>	Food
<i>mabêlê</i>	Sorghum
<i>phaletshê</i>	Mealie-meal
<i>sukiri</i>	Sugar
<i>letsawai</i>	Salt
<i>metsi</i>	Water
<i>mashi</i>	Milk
<i>ditamati</i>	Tomatoes
<i>ditapole</i>	Potatoes
<i>mae</i>	Eggs

<i>borotho</i>	Bread
<i>kofi</i>	Coffee
<i>tee</i>	Tea
<i>motôgô</i>	Soft porridge (made from sorghum / mealie-meal)
<i>anyense; kwii</i>	Onions
<i>namunê</i>	Orange
<i>apole</i>	Apple
<i>manôkô</i>	Peanuts
<i>dinawa</i>	Beans

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Lesson 15: Family

<i>ntate mogolo</i>	Grand father
<i>nkuku</i>	Grand mother
<i>ntate</i>	Father
<i>mmê; mma</i>	Mother
<i>kgaitsadi</i> (<i>said only to pers. of opposite gender</i>)	Sister ; Brother
<i>nkgonne</i> (<i>to either elder sister/ brother</i>)	Older sibling
<i>nnake</i> (<i>to either younger sister/ brother</i>)	Younger sibling
<i>rangwane</i>	Uncle (paternal)
<i>malome</i>	Uncle (maternal)
<i>rakgadi</i>	Aunt (paternal)
<i>mmane; mmangwane</i>	Aunt (maternal)
<i>ntsalake</i>	cousin
<i>batsadi</i>	Parents
<i>ngwana; bana (pl)</i>	Child/Children
<i>Lelwapa ; lelapa</i>	Family

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Lesson 16: Adverbs of Time

<i>gompieno</i>	Today
<i>maabane</i>	Yesterday
<i>kamoso</i>	Tomorrow
<i>maloba a maabane</i>	The day before yesterday
<i>maloba</i>	Few days ago
<i>beke e</i>	This week
<i>beke e e fitileng</i> (<i>lit. the week that passed</i>)	Last week
<i>beke e e tlang</i> (<i>lit. the week that is still to come</i>)	Next week
<i>ngwaga e</i>	This year
<i>ngogola ; ngwaga e e fitileng</i>	Last year
<i>ngwaga e e tlang</i>	Next year
<i>kgwedi e</i>	This month

<i>gone jaanong</i>	At the moment
<i>kgantele</i>	Later on; earlier on (depending on context)
<i>bosigo</i>	At night
<i>phakêla</i>	In the morning
<i>motshegare</i>	At noon (till sunset)
<i>maitseboa</i>	Around sunset

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Lesson 17: Days Activities

<i>Ke tsoga ka 6 phakela</i>	I wake up at 6am
<i>Ke a tlhana</i>	I bathe
<i>Ke bo ke ja</i>	And then I eat.
<i>Ke ya sekolong</i>	Then I go to school
<i>Ke tlhotse kwa sekolong</i>	I spent the day at school
<i>Re ne re dira dilo tse dintsi</i>	we were doing a lot of things today
<i>Gone go na le baeng ba mapodisi</i>	there were visitors from the Police
<i>Ke ne ke itumetse gompieno</i>	I was excited today
<i>Fa ke tswa sekolong, ke a itapolosa</i>	When I come back from school I rest.

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Lesson 18: Vocabulary 3 (Names of Places)

Places	English
Ntlo	House
Ttelase	Classroom
Thoeléte	Toilet
Kitsi	kitchen
sekolo; sekole	School
Sepatela	Hospital
kokelwana	Clinic
shopo; lebénkèle	Shop
Poso	Post office
noka; molapô	River
Tshimo	Field
Kérékê	Church
Banka	Bank
Kgotla	Customary court

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Lesson 19: Some Words with similar spelling but different in meaning

	High tone	Low tone	
<i>mabêlê</i> <i>mabêlê</i>	✓	✓	Sorghum Human breasts
<i>lapa</i> <i>lapa</i>	✓	✓	To be tired Home
<i>gôga</i> <i>gôga</i>		✓ ✓	To pull To smoke
<i>utlwâ</i> <i>utlwâ</i> <i>utlwâ</i>		✓ ✓ ✓	To feel To hear To taste
<i>nna</i> <i>nna</i>	✓	✓	Me To sit
<i>go fitlha</i> <i>go fitlha</i>	✓ ✓		To bury To hide something
<i>di kae?</i> <i>di kae?</i>	✓	✓	How many are there? Where are they?

Setswana unlike English, it is what is called a tonal language. In other words, every syllable has a high or low tone associated with it. It is this that gives Setswana its melodic sound.

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Lesson 20: Asking for Prices

<i>kgetse ya dinamunê ke bokae?</i>	How much is a bag of oranges?
<i>ke bokae?</i>	How much is it?
<i>ke P4.50</i>	It's P4.50
<i>namunê e le nngwe ke bokae?</i>	How much is each orange?
<i>e le nngwe ke 75 thebe</i>	They are 75 thebe each
<i>ke bokae gotlhe?; madi otlhe ke bokae?</i>	What's the total price?
<i>madi otlhe ke P17.50</i>	The total price is P17. 50

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Lesson 21: Weather

<i>Gompieno go serame; tsididi</i>	Today it is cold
<i>Gompieno go mogôte; molelô</i>	Today it is hot
<i>Go bothithô</i>	It is warm
<i>Go letsatsi</i>	It is sunny
<i>Go diphefô; phefô</i>	It is windy
<i>Gompieno go botoka</i>	Today it is better
<i>Selemô</i>	Summer
<i>mariga</i>	Winter

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Lesson 22: Health Expressions

<i>ke a lwala; ga ke a tsoga</i>	I am not well
<i>ke opiwa ke tlhogo</i>	I have a head ache
<i>mala ame a botlhoko</i>	My tummy hurts
<i>matlho a gagwe a botlhoko</i>	His eyes are sore
<i>Franco o ya tliliniking</i>	Franco is going to the clinic
<i>o ile ngakeng</i>	She/ he went to see the doctor
<i>o rurugile leoto</i>	Her leg is swollen
<i>Seema o jèle sengwe se se sa siamang</i>	Seema ate something bad
<i>ba batla go ya tliliniking</i>	They want to go to the clinic

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Lesson 23: Safety Expressions

<i>nthuse</i>	Help me
<i>ke kopa thuso</i>	I need help
<i>ke tlhasetswe</i>	I have been attacked, I am being attacked.
<i>go thubilwe kwa lwapeng; ntlung</i>	My house has been broken into.
<i>Ke utswetswe</i>	There has been theft in my house.
<i>ke thukuthilwe</i>	I have been robbed

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