# Language Acquisition Experiment Log

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## Contents

# 1  Experiment Parameters

- Duration: From June 1st to June 25th, 2021.

- Experimenter: Samuel Pearce

- Participants: Amin Haidar (M19) and Julian Werner (M18)

# 2  Experiment Rules

1. The experimenter is, at no point during the experiment period, allowed to explain anything about Toki Pona to the participants in any language other than Toki Pona.

2. The participants are not allowed to independently seek resources about Toki Pona. Any external resources for them are to be provided by the experimenter.

3. The participants may converse with one another in a seperate language as long as the experimenter is not present.

4. The participants may take notes and review them outside of experimentation times. The notes may be shared amongst themselves, but not with the experimenter, until the experiment is over.

# 3  Day 1 - June 1st

The first session began in a text chat with the ability to send emoji and images. The experimenter attempted to establish the basic sentence structure with comprehensible pictographic substitution. The pictographic elements will be replaced in this log with simple descriptions of their contents or meaning in square brackets ([ Image ; Intended Meaning ])

(1)  pona li    [Thumbs Up; Good]
     good SUB [Thumbs Up; Good]
     "pona" (is) "good"

(2)  ike  li    [Thumbs Down; Bad]
     bad SUB [Thumbs Down; Bad]
     "ike" (is) "bad"

Which was generally perceived correctly, but neither participant immediately understood the meaning of the subject-verb separator "li". The next concepts to be introduced were "yes/correct" and "no/incorrect" to enforce the participants correct usage of phrases.

(3)  ala li    [Red X-Shape; No/Incorrect]
     no  SUB [Red X-Shape; No/Incorrect]
     "ala" (is) "No/Incorrect"

(4)  lon li    [Green Checkmark; Yes/Correct]
     yes SUB [Green Checkmark; Yes/Correct]

     "lon" is "Yes/Correct"

After the basic structure was grasped, the word for person — a prefix required to write names in Toki Pona — was explained along with the basic pronouns by using the participant's names. For this, it was fortunate that there were at least three people present, in order to explain the concepts of first, second, and third person.

(5)  mi   jan.      sina jan.      [Face; Person] li    jan
     1P.S be-person. 2P.S be-person. [Face; Person] SUB be-person

     I am a person. You are a person. People are people.

At this explanation, both participants independently responded with variations on the following:

(6)  jan     li    [Face; Person]
     person SUB [Face; Person]

     "jan" (is) "person"

To which, the experimenter could now respond with "lon" meaning, "Yes" or "Correct". Given the informal nature of the experiment, both participants took the opportunity of having the basic "thing is thing" sentence structure to insult one another and the experimenter by saying variations of the following:

(7)  jan     Julian li    ike.
     person Julian SUB be-bad

     Julian is bad.

It was around this time that correct Toki Pona spelling was explained, through amphasized corrections. One participant used the other's name in lower case, which the experimenter corrected by responding to it, with the corrected capital letter emphasized. This concept was quite quickly understood.

Once we began speaking face-to-face, the experimenter explained the Toki Pona demonstrative "ni" by pointing at various things and explaining what they were using the established vocabulary.

(8)  ni   li    ijo.
     this SUB be-thing

     This is a thing.

With the basic framework of these 10 words, explaining other novel concepts through the use of images was quite easy and got both participants forming basic sentences to describe their environment and what they were doing quite quickly:

| Toki Pona | English |
|---:|:---|
| li | Subject-Verb Seperator |
| mi | I, me, my, we, us, our |
| sina | you, your |
| ona | he, she, it, him, her, his, hers, its |
| pona | good, simple |
| ike | bad, complicated |
| lon | yes, correct, true |
| ala | no, not, none |
| ni | this, that |
| ijo | thing |

After some basic nouns were learned through pictograms, the more complicated concept of motion and giving/receiving things was discussed. At first the word "tawa", meaning "to move" was explained by the experimenter getting up and walking across the room while saying "mi tawa." ("I go/walk."). After this, the preposition form of "tawa" was explained using the help of the word "pana" which means "to give". One of the participants handed the experimenter a book and asked what he was doing, to which the experimenter replied:

(9)  sina pana e    ni   tawa     mi.
     2P.S give  ACC this PREP.to 1P.s

     You are giving this to me.

After a few clarifications and re-enunciations, the participants understood the meaning. At around this point, One participant began compiling a shared dictionary with the other participant. The final concept explained was the opposite. That of "kama" meaning "to arrive/come" or "to become" and the concept of "tan" meaning "from". "kama" was fairly easily explained by a pictograph of a person walking in the opposite direction from a similar pictograph labelled "tawa". After that, the experimenter attempted to strengthen the understanding by passing around the book again and trying to explain that the book came from him:

(10)  mi  pana e    ni   tawa    sina. ni li   kama tan      mi.
      1P.S give  ACC this PREP.to 2P.S. this SUB come PREP.from 1P.S

      I give this to you. This came from me.

Though the efforts were not fruitful, it eventually occurred to the experimenter to use the mutual knowledge of each other's lives to cement tan's meaning:

(11)  mi    kama tan      ma      New Zealand[1].
      1P.S come PREP.from country New Zealand.

      I come from New Zealand.

This was immediately understood and served to make the participants sure of their guesses as to its meaning.

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[1]New Zealand would normally be referred to as "ma Nusilan", like all foreign words, to conform to Toki Pona's phonetics, but it was decided to choose the style of simply using words' native forms, to simplify referring to external subjects.

This first session ended with the participants discussing their findings together and editing their shared dictionary to reflect new knowledge. All members then discussed (in English) the plans of when to meet and what the scope of the experiment should be. It was suggested that they could also learn Sitelen Pona, Toki Pona's own logographic writing system. This was left open as an option depending on how much the participants were able to learn in the time allotted. Both participants seem enthusiastic to continue the experiment out of their own curiosity.