

Mini: The Minimal Language



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Mini is an attempt to create the simplest naturalistic language for human communication.

With simple phonetics, inflectionless grammar, and a global vocabulary of exactly 1,000 words, Mini is ideal for use as an international auxiliary language.

Features of Mini:

Subject-Verb-Object

Purely analytic grammar

Part-of-speech invariance: Mini uses three particles to mark the part of speech. This allows most words to be used any part of speech.

Only 19 phonemes: Five vowels /a e i o u/ and fourteen consonants /b d f g k l m n p r s t v/ and j /dʒ/

Simple phonotactics: Each syllable has a simple consonant-vowel structure (C?Vn?), similar to many Austronesian languages.

Only 1,000 words: The goal of Mini is to have as limited a vocabulary as possible while still being sufficient for most spoken conversations, news articles, blog posts, short stories, etc. — everything except technical jargon.

Powerful word-compounding system

International breadth & depth: Mini strives to balance international recognizability with language breadth. A majority of words are sourced from English and the Romance languages, but many other source languages are included, from Arabic to Zulu.

I. Introduction

He knows that there are in the soul tints more bewildering, more numberless, and more nameless than the colours of an autumn forest... Yet he seriously believes that these things can every one of them, in all their tones and semitones, in all their blends and unions, be accurately represented by an arbitrary system of grunts and squeals. He believes that an ordinary civilized stockbroker can really produce out of this own inside noises which denote all the mysteries of memory and all the agonies of desire.

— GK Chesterton, as quoted in Borges' *The Analytical Machine of John Wilkins*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a man in possession of an unhealthy interest in languages and too much time on his hands must be in want of a language of his own creation.

There have certainly been many attempts. In 1688, John Wilkins published an *Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*, in which he describes a new universal language shorn of the vagaries and ambiguities of natural language. In place of Latin or a spoken language like English, Wilkins desired a new lingua franca for scholars, travelers, and businessmen composed solely of the most basic elements of thought. Wilkins devised a taxonomy of 40 general categories for his language. Vocabulary would be constructed by subdividing those basic categories into “differences” and “species.”

That which at present seems most convenient to me, is this :

General	Bot	Exanguious	Za	Spiritual	Co
(Rel. mixed	Ba	Fish	Zb	Corporal	Ca
(Rel. of Action	Be	Bird	Zc	Motion	Ce
Discourse	Bi	Beast	Zi	Operation	Ci
God	Dat	Peculiar	Pd		
World	Da	General	Pa	Orcon.	Co
Element	De	Magnitude	Pe	Pollef.	Cy
Stone	Di	Space	Pi	Provis.	Sc
Metal	Do	Measure	Po	Civil	Si
Leaf	Gd	Power Nat.	Td	Judicial	Se
Flower	Ga	Habit	Ta	Military	Si
(Seed-vessel	Ge	Manners	Te	Naval	So
Shrub	Gi	Quality sensible	Ti	Ecclef.	Sy
Tree	Go	Discrete	To		

The Differences under each of these Genus's, may be expressed by these Consonants: B, D, G, P, T, C, Z, S, N.
In this order 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9.

The Species may be expressed by putting one of the seven Vowels after the Consonant, for the Difference 1, to which may be added (to make up the number) two of the Diphthongs, according to this order
a, e, i, o, u, y, yb.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9.

For instance, If (De) signifie *Element*, then (Deb) must signifie the first difference 1, which (according to the Tables) is *Fire*; and (Debat) will denote the first Species, which is *Flame*. (Det) will be the fifth difference under that Genus, which is, *Appearing Meteor*; (Detat) the first Species, viz. *Rainbow*; (Detat) the second, viz. *Hail*.

Thus, if (Ti) signifie the Genus of *sensible Quality*, then (Tid) must denote the second difference, which comprehends *Colours*; and (Tida) must signifie the second Species under that difference, viz. *Redness*; (Tide) the third Species, which is *Orange*, &c.

Thus likewise, if (Be) be put for the Genus of *Transcendental Relation of Action*, then (Bec) must denote the sixth difference, which is *Disc*; and (Becy) will signifie the sixth Species, which is *Following*.

As for those Species under Plants and Animals, which do exceed the number of Nine, they may be expressed by adding the Letters *L*, or *R*, after the first Consonant, to denote the second or third of such Combinations. Thus, if Gdtle be *Tulip*, viz. the third Species in the first Nine, then Gdtle must signifie *Rainbow*, viz. the third in the second Nine, or the twelfth Species under that Difference. So if Zana be *salmon*, viz. the second Species in the first Nine, then Zlana must signifie *Gadfish*, viz. the second in the second Nine; or the eleventh Species under that Difference.

It

The categories of Wilkins' *Real Character*

For instance, the word for fire, *Deb*, is the “first difference” formed from the category of elements, *De*. And the word for flame, *Debat*, is the “first species” of fire. Wilkins believed every object in the world could be described unambiguously and uniquely with this approach. The discovery of a new animal or

feature of the physical world would thus mean a new word — and vice versa.

Wilkins never completed his language. His published manuscript was merely a proof of concept — but even then there were problems. For starters, Wilkins' approach to word derivation made it difficult to tell words apart: words derived from a common root would sound too similar to each other and be too difficult to differentiate. Wilkins himself was known to make errors, mistaking *Gade* (barley) for *Gape* (tulip).*

The more damning problem for Wilkins' approach is philosophical: there simply is no one obvious taxonomy for all objects and concepts. It is certainly true that one can create a language that derives all of its vocabulary from a few basic concepts. But what makes certain concepts basic rather than others? And what about derived words? What are the rules for deriving new words from basic concepts? Are those rules for derivation simple algorithmic procedures or complex divinations

that require human discretion? And if those word derivations cannot be performed algorithmically — and in Wilkin's case, they were not — then is there not a degree of arbitrariness and convention in the word choices themselves? These were questions Wilkins could not answer.

But the dream of constructing a newer, simpler, more rational language lived on. Over the course of subsequent centuries, linguists, hobbyists, and mad utopians have dreamed up more languages than mankind has collectively spoken. In 1827, a French linguist created Solresol, a language based on musical notes. In the 20th century, a group of hobbyists created Lojban, a language modeled after predicate calculus with perfectly regular grammar (and a Yacc parser to prove it!). (Lojban itself is descendent of an earlier logical language called Loglan.)

The most famous constructed language, of course, is Esperanto. Esperanto was born out of Polish linguist L.L. Zamenhof's dream of international unity and human solidarity: He created the

language to serve as a culturally neutral universal second language, which he believed would foster peace. (Esperanto's utopian ideals were not without detractors. One particularly acerbic critic devotes several paragraphs to excoriating Esperantists in his best-selling political manifesto.)

In contrast to Solresol and Lojban, Esperanto is an *a posteriori* language — a language derived from other natural languages, rather than created *de novo*. This has been the key to its (rather modest) success. Esperanto is essentially a streamlined and grammatically consistent version of a Western European language (with a few Slavisms thrown in for good measure). An educated reader of English can get the gist of most sentences without any prior study.

And yet, despite Esperanto's relative ease of learning, the language did not catch on. If there is a universal second language in the world today, it's English, not Esperanto. The demands of

learning a new language from study — even a very simple one — are simply too great.

Given the great variety of constructed languages over the last few centuries and their limited success in adoption, it would seem quixotic in the extreme to try to develop a new one...

My own linguistic slumber was roused after learning about Toki Pona. Toki Pona (TP) is a brilliant micro-language of 120–125 words created by linguist Sonja Lang. Unlike Wilkins' Real Characteristic or Lojban, TP was not made to be a more logical and precise language — rather the opposite. Lang originally created TP as a way of coping with depression and intended for it to be simple and cute. This it certainly achieves.

TP's simplicity and cuteness is a result of its simple phonology and simple vocabulary limited to “cute” words like *mu* (moo) or *mama* (parent). The grammatical premise of TP is no less cute: it employs strict Subject-Verb-Object word order and uses a single

particle word, *li*, to separate the subject from the predicate and another, *e*, to introduce the direct object. This allows the words of TP to serve as many different parts of speech depending on their position in a sentence and ensures that TP's small vocabulary is put to good use.

jan pona mi li moku e kili lili.
My friend (good person) eats the small fruit.

But the technique is not without its drawbacks. Perhaps the biggest problem with TP as a language is its rampant ambiguity. Semantic vagueness is to be expected in a language of only 125 words, but the main source of frustration is actually grammatical. There is no explicit copula, so it can be difficult to tell if a sentence contains a verb or not. Moreover, since TP prepositions can serve as many parts of speech and can be used without the predicate separator, it can be very difficult to parse certain sentences.

soweli li moku.
The animal eats. OR The animal is food. mi wile e tomo tawa sina.
I want your car (moving construct). OR I want a house (construct) for you.

In addition to grammatical ambiguity, TP has several more problems:

It's not really a recursive language: It lacks dependent clauses, and thus makes certain sentences very hard to express (e.g. "There is nothing I would rather do than go swimming" would be very difficult to translate).

The vocabulary selection is somewhat poor — at least from the perspective of trying to communicate within the context of everyday life. (From the perspective of the language's stated purpose of being maximally cute, it's perfect: out of the hundred-something words of the language, a significant proportion are devoted to animals: there's a word for bird, fish, cute animal, non-cute animal, the onomatopoeia that animals make, etc.)

The language's austere phonology makes it such that the word roots are unrecognizable. If you squint, *toki* looks kind of like the English *talk* and *pona* looks kind of like the Latin *bona*, but it's a stretch. Other words are even less recognizable.

Ambiguity is especially bad for constructed languages because they lack the historical norms and community standards that natural languages possess. Without a shared social context for word usage, explicit rules become more important.

The upshot of all these problems is that it is very difficult to communicate anything that is even marginally complex in TP. If you go onto TP forums and chatrooms, you will often see fluent speakers having to translate their relatively basic posts back into English because no one can understand what they are trying to say.

The spark that led me to create Mini was realizing that a micro-language like TP could actually *work*: there's no reason in principle a language with a limited word-count couldn't have a simple, complete, and unambiguous grammar alongside a vocabulary based on intelligible word roots designed to handle most aspects of everyday discourse.

Mini solves a lot of TP's problems by streamlining and disambiguating the grammar. Mini's first big departure from TP is to replace the single predicate marker *li* and direct object marker *e* with particle words that indicate the part of speech.

Instead of using *li* as both the copula and a marker to introduce verbs, Mini uses 3 different particles to mark the introduction of a verb (*i*), noun (*a*), or adjective (*e*), respectively. The latter two also serve as copulae, and allow for greater precision in specifying whether the predicate is nominal or adjectival.

This change helps massively in reducing ambiguity, at the cost of only one additional piece of vocabulary.

Animale i manja. *The animal eats.* Animale a manja.
The animal is food. Animale e manja. *The animal is*
food-ish (i.e. edible). Animale i manja a veji. *The animal*
eats the plant.

Compared to a language like English, which has only one major copula (the verb *to be*), it might seem needlessly academic to have two different particle words for predication. But I can

assure you from having spoken previous iterations of the language that that's not the case!

Consider these two Mini sentences:

Da e duro. *That is hard.* Da a duro. *That is a problem.*

There is a world of difference between them! If you say the first sentence to someone struggling with something, they might interpret it as a sign statement of empathy, “I understand what you’re dealing with is difficult and I sympathize, but please continue.” Whereas the latter sentence uttered in an actual conversation would indicate that what the addressee is doing is ineffective and needs to change.

The English language solves the problem of distinguishing between adjectival and nominal predication in two ways: 1. by employing words which are primarily one part of speech, and 2. by using articles. Mini lacks the latter and is designing explicitly to prevent the former, so must use grammatical particles to

indicate the part of speech. TP does not do this, and makes certain types of real-world communication much more difficult.

Mini resolves the remainder of TP's grammatical ambiguities largely through stricter rules governing word order, especially for prepositions and conjunctions:

Mi toma go tu a kosa.
I take the thing to you. Mi toma a kosa go tu.
I take the thing (meant) for you. I go eki!
Go away!

However, to achieve grammatical parity with English, Mini adds a lot of grammatical constructs that don't exist in TP: existential statements, verb tenses, participles, comparisons, dependent clauses, compounds words, etc.

Most of these grammatical additions are accommodated through the novel interpretation of preexisting vocabulary, with minimal additional grammatical words beyond the particles introduced above:

En-i ave go, viro i de vole go baka.
Having gone, the man wanted to go back. A nulo ke mi vole ma
sama ke tu kite.
There's nothing I want more than that you leave. Mi da manja
a pan, pero si ave a mala aroma.
I would eat the bread, but it has a bad smell.

The result is a grammar that is as expressive as English but with a fraction of the vocabulary.

Creating Mini's vocabulary proved to be almost as difficult as the grammar. The first task was to choose a phonology and orthography. I admired TP's commitment to phonological simplicity and its Austronesian-inspired consonant-vowel syllable structure, but I also wanted to ensure substantial etymological transparency, à la Esperanto. Another non-negotiable requirement was that there be a one-to-one mapping between sound and spelling.

This is a difficult balance to strike. TP and Esperanto can be thought of as two different extremes of etymological transparency. One example: The word for science in Esperanto is

scienco and is pronounced /st̪iˈent̪o/. This is the human language equivalent of scratching a nail across a chalkboard. But at least you can tell the word means *science*! On the other end of the spectrum is TP. The word for knowledge or science is *sona*, which is much easier to pronounce but much more difficult to decipher.

My compromise solution to the simplicity-versus-etymology dilemma was to expand the alphabet to 19 letters (a b d e f g i j k l m n o p r s t u v) while retaining the consonant-vowel syllabification. These phonotactics are powerful enough to ensure that word roots are recognizable while still being simple and easy to pronounce. Mini uses the same five vowel system as German, Malay, and many other languages, and the consonants match their English equivalents. There are no diphthongs or consonant clusters.

It is true that for a language with a small fixed number of words, 19 letters is a sort of profligacy: Half that many would probably

suffice (or, if you are a computer, two). But the additional alphabetic complexity is more than offset by the greater ease of vocabulary recognition for a larger fraction of the Earth's population. (Another benefit of using a relatively larger alphabet is that the pronunciation is a bit more forgiving. If you like, you can pronounce /v/ as /w/, /f/, or /b/ and still be understood.)

My approach in choosing vocabulary was to try to pick the word that would be recognizable to the greatest number of people worldwide given the phonetic constraints of the language, while also trying to include as many languages as possible. This led naturally to selecting most (but not all!) words from English or the Romance languages, which are the first and third in terms of total numbers of speakers globally (assuming you bundle all the Romance languages into one category), and which both possess enough phonetically simple words to squeeze into Mini's procrustean bed.

For many concepts, there is no obvious “internationally recognizable” word. For these, I felt free to draw from a much wider set of world languages, giving precedence to larger-population languages and languages I hadn’t previously included.

This approach leads to a vocabulary which is both internationally recognizable and inclusive of a wide diversity of languages, from Lakota to Hungarian to Zulu.

What makes Mini unique versus other constructed languages is the fact that it attempts to have both the atomic recombability of an *a priori* language while also being fully *a posteriori*.

Like Wilkins’ Real Character, *a priori* languages attempt to decompose the elements of thought into distinct atomic units and build up larger linguistic constructs from those simpler units.

A posteriori languages like Esperanto take a very different approach: rather than starting from scratch with a set of basic concepts, they attempt to pave over the unnecessary grammatical quirks and complications of natural language to create something which is simple and easier to learn.

Mini's goal is to fully realize both of these visions: to have, at once, a set of linguistic primitives which can be combined to discuss any topic, while ensuring that those primitives are themselves borrowed as directly from natural languages as possible.

This goal manifests itself not only in vocabulary selection, but also in the grammar of the language itself. The core unique grammatical feature of the language, the particle *i*, is itself borrowed from a real-life creole language, Tok Pisin. And this particle is used to derive more complex grammatical patterns analogously to those that exist in natural language.

One example: Consider infinitives in English. They are formed using the pattern *to [verb]*. Mini borrows this idiom exactly, forming the infinitive using *go-i [verb]*.

This example is a metonymy for Mini as whole: simple primitives, borrowed directly from natural language, are combined to form more complex ideas, in a manner which parallels natural language. The result is a language is that simple to use, easy to learn, and powerful in scope.

A note on simplicity: As Bertrand Russell said, everything is complicated to a degree you do not realize until you try to make it precise. The same is true for simplicity in language. I believe the concept can be broken down along three distinct dimensions:

Language inventory, or having as few phonemes, morphemes, and grammatical structures as possible.

Expressiveness: All things equal, the simpler language is the one that allows you to express the same concept using fewer terms.

Naturalness: A simpler language is one that feels more “natural” for people to use. This is obviously a somewhat subjective category, but if English and other natural languages were at one end of this spectrum of naturalness, something like assembly code would be at the other. (Lojban would be in between, further toward the assembly code direction.)

These dimensions are often at odds with each other: All else equal, it is easier to learn a language that sounds and operates closer to one you already know than one with fewer phonemes and fewer rules. Similarly, a language with a tiny but regular grammar may feel awkward, stilted, and less natural in actual conversation.

Despite the fact that these dimensions of linguistic simplicity often conflict, there is no doubt that some languages are more complex on the whole than others: Hungarian, Russian, and Ancient Greek are much more complex languages to learn and speak than Spanish or Indonesian. Among natural languages,

pidgins and creoles tend to be the simplest. These are languages like Haitian Creole or Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea that formed when different linguistic communities collide and have to find a means to communicate. Pidgins have simplified phonology, grammar, and vocabulary by necessity.

One could say that pidgin languages are on the “efficient frontier” of linguistic simplicity, to borrow a term from economics. That is, they could be made simpler along any one of the three dimensions, but only at the cost of increasing complexity in the others. A constructed language like Esperanto is probably on this frontier as well — it’s perhaps more expressive than Tok Pisin, but a bit less “natural”.

This brings us back to our original claim: that Mini is the simplest language. We can now refine that claim to be that Mini is the most expressive and natural-sounding language of its size. I will make no final judgement as to whether this project has been successful, but I will say this: *Si a bon demo de ke uno linga*

i kan make! (It's a good demonstration of what one language can do!)

II. Phonology & Orthography

Mini has 19 letters, a b d e f g i j k l m n o p r s t u v.

Each letter matches its International Phonetic Alphabet pronunciation with the exception of J, which is the English /dʒ/.

Words are 1–4 syllables, with each syllable sharing the same structure: optional consonant, vowel, optional “n”, or C?Vn?.

There are no consonant clusters or diphthongs.

If a syllable ending in the letter N is followed by a P or a B, the letter is written instead as an M: tenpo => tempo; menba => memba

Stress falls on the penultimate syllable. One-syllable words are usually stressed, unless they are being used as prepositions, conjunctions, or particles.

The ideal Mini accent would sound something like Latin American Spanish or Bahasa Indonesia.

Mini can be written in all lowercase, but given the ubiquity of modern word processors and the patterns they impose, we use the same orthographic conventions as English: uppercase for proper nouns and the beginnings of sentences, lowercase elsewhere.

III. Vocabulary

Mini has a vocabulary of exactly 1,000 words.

The goal of Mini is to have as limited a vocabulary as possible while still being sufficient for most spoken conversations, news

articles, blog posts, short stories, etc. — everything except technical jargon.

Each word is intended to be as recognizable as possible from its respective source language, have a meaning that is maximally disjoint from the others, and be as useful as possible in forming compound words.

The vocabulary was selected in part by consulting word frequency lists in several languages and opportunistically merging similar words.

A significant portion — perhaps a third — of Mini's vocabulary is derived from Glosa, a conlang created in the 70's. Given Mini's phonetic constraints, there aren't many direct borrowings, but there are a lot of semantic equivalents.

A much smaller portion of the vocabulary is derived from other conlangs: Esperanto, Pandunia, and Globasa. But the majority is sourced directly from natural languages.

My “algorithm” for sourcing vocabulary:

If there is an obvious internationally recognizable word, choose that: banana, guru, tobako

If there is a non-Western loanword common in English or the Romance languages, choose that: tabu, tipi, geko

If there is a Romance or Germanic term that is easily recognizable, use that: agila, bebe, fide

Otherwise, choose the best-fitting word from all the world’s major languages, giving precedence to larger-population languages or languages that haven’t already been used: igi (Yoruba), jin (Mandarin), pukko (Finnish)

Each word additionally must:

Satisfy Mini’s phonetic constraints (C?Vn?) and be no more than 4 syllables.

Match the pronunciation or orthography (or ideally, both) of one source language as closely as possible (as opposed to “blending” words of different origins).

Avoid words which sound too similar, especially when they are used in similar contexts.

This approach leads to a vocabulary which is both internationally recognizable and inclusive of a wide diversity of languages, from Lakota to Hungarian to Zulu.

It’s worth noting the particle *i* — a core feature of Mini’s grammar — is actually a direct importation from Tok Pisin.

In true postmodern fashion, Mini’s vocabulary oscillates between the high- and the low-brow. On the one hand, there are borrowings from Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit (e.g. *fusi*, fusion; *lipo*, fat; *duka*, suffering). On the other, there are colloquialisms like *tivi*, television; *pipi*, urine; and *dogi*, dog.

A random sample of the vocabulary arranged by theme:

Colors: bulu, ruja, midori, pila

Animals: gato, dogi, kavalo, muso

Food: keju, keki, vino, patata

Furniture: kabinete, sofa, kama

Emotions: joli, melankoli, furi, fobo

Technology: komputa, radio, fon

Clothing: roba, jaketa, sapato, topi

Abstractions: idea, neso, loji, siensa

Body: neka, pedi, lunge, rena

Time: ora, minute, soma, ano

Direction: direto, levi, nore, vese

People: bebe, kinde, raja, polisa

Places: kasa, siti, patio, kampo

Mini's vocabulary is divided into two parts: Mini Kore, the core 120-word list (which forms a complete albeit limited language of its own), and Mini Mundo, a supplemental vocabulary of 880 words.

[View the full glossary](#)

IV. Grammar

Basic Sentence Structure

Mini words can serve as many different parts of speech depending on their position in a sentence. Mini uses a few different particle words to help determine what part of speech a word is.

The particle i introduces the verb; a introduces the direct object.

These two particles give rise to Mini's basic sentence structure:

[subject] i [verb] a [object]Tu i manja. You
eat.Man i bibe a vasa. Someone drinks water.Bobi i
vasa a veji. Bob waters the plants.

Predication

Mini lacks the verb *to be*. Instead, the particle *a* is used as the copula for predicative nominals (in addition to marking the direct object):

[subject] a [noun] Bob a man. *Bob is a person.* Ise a vasa. *Ice is water.* Veji a manja. *The vegetable is food.*

Mini uses another copula, the particle *e*, for predicative adjectives.

[subject] e [adjective] Manja e kula. *The food is cold.* Bob e vasa. *Bob is wet.* Manja e Bob. *The food is Bob's.*

We have now introduced the 3 particle words that Mini uses to indicate parts of speech:

Particle	Introduces the...	verb
a	direct object & nominal complement	
e	adjectival & adverbial complement	

Noun Phrase Word Order

Mini does not use inflection. The number, gender, case, mood, tense, etc. of words must be inferred from context or stated explicitly.

Adjectives in Mini come before the noun and employ a strict word-ordering:

mega loke *big placeno* mui kolo
not much colordika feo bebe *fat ugly baby*
 mui vasa kolo ropa
 = (mui (vasa (kolo ropa)))
 = (many (water (color clothes)))
 = many wet colorful clothes

The particle *o* can be used to change the associativity of
 modifiers, i.e. how different modifiers within a phrase are
 grouped. Note that the particle *o* is not a preposition and does
 not have an English equivalent.

mui vasa o kolo ropa
 = ((mui vasa) (kolo ropa))
 = ((very water) (color clothes))
 = *very wet colorful clothes*
 mui vasa kolo o ropa
 = ((mui (vasa kolo)) ropa)
 = *very water-color clothes*
 = *very blue clothes*

The particle *o* can also be used to mark or emphasize a word's
 usage as a modifier:

sama o kasa
same houses
 sama kasa
like a house (sama used here as preposition)

Personal Pronouns

Mini uses the following personal pronouns:

mi first person
tu second person
si third person

Pronouns are not declined for gender or number. To indicate plurality or gender, a specific word like *ale* or *feme* must be added. Grammatically, these words are treated as compound nouns.

mi	<i>I / me</i>
mi-duo	<i>we two</i>
mi-ale	<i>we (includes addressee)</i>
mi-mui	<i>we (excludes addressee)</i>
mi-ego	<i>myselftu you</i>
tu-ale	<i>you all</i>
tu-ego	<i>yourselfsi he / she / it</i>
si-viro	<i>he</i>
si-feme	<i>she</i>
si-kosa	<i>it</i>
si-ale	<i>they</i>
si-uno	<i>one (indefinite pronoun)</i>
si-ego	<i>himself / herself / itself</i>
si-ota	<i>the other one</i>

When personal pronouns are used as modifiers, they become possessives.

tu kaja	<i>your box</i>	si note	<i>his/her/its note</i>
ale kosa	<i>our thing</i>	ale mi kosa	<i>all my things</i>

To emphasize or disambiguate the possessive usage of a pronoun, use *o*:

si o feme his/her/its woman

Particle Dropping

Mini allows the dropping of grammatical particles in cases where the meaning is unambiguous.

This is often the case for shorter sentences where the subject or object is a single pronoun or proper noun.

Mi i amo a tu. => Mi amo tu.
I love you. Si i mira a Bob. => Si mira Bob.
S/he sees Bob.

Prepositions

Prepositional phrases typically follow the words that they modify, but adverbial prepositional phrases may follow the direct object, if unambiguous.

If a prepositional phrase is used as the predicate, the sentence must use the particle *e*.

de	from, of, about, by, out of, made of
en	in, at, on
go	to, for, go
kon	with
sama	like, as, than, same

Bob e de Amerika.
Bob is from America.

Alisa e en London.	<i>Alice is in London.</i>
Da e go tu.	<i>That's for you.</i>
Bob e kon Alisa.	<i>Bob is with Alice.</i>
Mi e sama tu.	<i>I am like you.</i>
kosa go tu.	<i>I take the thing to you.</i>
Alisa i viva en London.	<i>Alice lives in London.</i>
Man en pan-botega i manja.	<i>The man in the bakery eats.</i>

In addition to the five main prepositions above, Mini uses the following prepositions as well:

afa	after
ante	before
anti	against
inta	between
supa	above
tila	until
unda	under
via	through, across, over

Mi i dona unda mesa a kosa.
I put the thing under the table.
 Via mundo, a mui man.
Across the world, there are many people.

Many prepositions in English can be expressed as a compound prepositional phrase of the form *en [location/manner] de*:

Mi i go en lado de mi animale.
I go next to my pet (at the side of my pet).
 En baka de tu, a leon.
Behind you, there's a lion.

Mini prepositions can often be used as verbs, where they express
a more directed action:

Alisa i go a retorante.

Alice goes to the restaurant. Alisa i kon a Bob.

Alice includes Bob. Bob i via a jalan.

Bob crosses the street.

They can also be used as modifiers:

Mi i kipa en.

I stay in.

Genitive

When personal pronouns and proper names are used as
modifiers, they are treated as possessive.

The same is not true of other nouns, and the genitive must be
formed explicitly using the preposition *de* — not the particle *o*!

Mi kosa

My thing

Mi-ale ludi

Our game

Bob manja

Bob's food Ale animale o ludi Totally

animalistic game

Mui fogo o loke

Very fiery place Ludi de ale animale

Game of all animals

Loke de mui fogo

Place of many fires

Comparisons

Comparisons can be formed using *ma*, *meno*, and *sama*:

good	bon
better	ma bon (more good)
best	da ma bon (that more good)
worse	meno bon (less good)
worst	da meno bon (that less good)

Mi e sama mega sama tu.

I am as big as you. Da e ma bon.

That is better. Mi e ma bon sama tu.

I am better than you. Di feruta e meno ruja sama da.

This fruit is less red than that one. Da pan e da ma bon.

That bread is the best.

It is permissible to omit *o* in comparative and superlative

sentences if the context is unambiguous:

Da a da ma feo dogi. => Da a da ma feo dogi.

That's the ugliest dog.

Conjunctions

Mini uses the three following basic conjunctions, which

correspond reasonably well to their English usage:

an *and*

pero *but*

u *or, either* Alisa an Bobi i pale mui.

Alice and Bob talk a lot. Tu i vole a kafe u tea?

Do you want coffee or tea? Mi i toma an manja a veji.

I take and eat the fruit. Mi i vole a maron u bianka o pan.

I want the brown or white bread. Mi i kamina en foreta, pero

si i kipa en.
I walk in the forest, but he stays inside. Pan a manja, e
bon, an i ave a poten aroma.
Bread is food, is good, and has a powerful aroma. U animale
i kipa, u mi i kite.
Either the animal stays, or I leave.

The particle *o* can be used to group conjunctive phrases:

Mi fili i manja a antika o pan an keju.
My children eat the old bread and old cheese. Mi i vole a
bulu u mega o fiore.
I want the blue flower or the big flower.

Mini conjunctions can also be used as other parts of speech:

Mi i vole go an. *I want to go too.* Si a pero
kinde. *He is but a child.* Tu no kan go a u
moda. *You can't go either way.* Mi i an a si a mi
seri. *I add it to my list.*

Adverbial phrases

Mini sentences may be preceded or followed by an adverbial
phrase to establish context:

Afa, mi-ale go. *Afterward, we go.* Mi-ale
debe kipa di, tamen. *We should stay here, however.*

Yes-or-no questions

Yes-or-no questions can be formed by using a question mark and rising intonation (when spoken) or by appending a tag question such as *no?*, *ja?*, or *u ke?* to the end of a sentence.

Si vole resi? *Does he want to sleep?* Si vole go, u ke? *Does he want to go or what?* No, si no vole go.
No, he does not want to go.

Interrogative

The interrogative pronoun *ke* is used to ask questions. Unlike English, the word ordering does not change.

Tu i ke? *You what?* Tu a ke (man)?
What (person) / Who are you? Tu e ke?
How are you? Tu i go en ke tempo? *When (at what time) do you go?* Tu i manja a ke mui? *How much do you eat?* Tu i vole uti a ke kosa? *Which thing do you want to use?* Tu i kite go ke rason? *Why (for what reason) did you leave?* Tu dogi e en ke (loke)? *Where is your dog?* Tu dogi e ke mega? *How big is your dog?*

The pronoun *ke* can also be used in interjections:

Ke dare! *How daring!*

Dependent Clauses

The word *ke* can be used to introduce dependent clauses:

Tu vole manja afa ke tu aroma a pan.

You want to eat after you smell the bread. Mi vole go a tu loke, ante ke tu fini labora.

I want to go to your place before you finish working. Feme pensa ke si fili i debe manja a veji.

The woman thinks her son should eat the vegetables. Mi i savi ke tu i vole go. => Mi savi tu vole go.

I know you want to go.

The word *ke* can also be used to initiate a relative clause

modifying a noun:

Man, ke ave a mui mone, no vole labora.

A person who has a lot of money does not want to work. Balo, kon ke kinde i ludi, e bulu.

The ball with which the child is playing is blue. Mi i go ave a ke si-feme i en ave.

I'll have what she's having.

Correlatives

Correlatives are words used to ask or answer a question.

Mini has a systematic way of generating these expressions, but also employs a number of shorthand words for more common

cases. E.g. the word *nun* (now) can be used in place of *di tempo* (this time).

Press enter or click to view image in full size

	interrogative	subordinative	demonstrative	demonstrative	indefinite	universal	negative
individual	ke (man)	man ke...	di (man)	da (man)	some (man)	ale (man)	nulo / no man
	<i>who?</i>	<i>who...</i>	<i>this one</i>	<i>that one</i>	<i>somebody</i>	<i>everybody</i>	<i>nobody</i>
thing	ke (kosa)	kosa ke...	di (kosa)	da (kosa)	some (kosa)	ale (kosa)	nulo / no kosa
	<i>what?</i>	<i>which...</i>	<i>this (thing)</i>	<i>that (thing)</i>	<i>something</i>	<i>everything</i>	<i>nothing</i>
quality	ke tipo	tipo ke...	di tipo	da tipo	some tipo	ale tipo	no tipo
	<i>what kind?</i>	<i>the kind which...</i>	<i>that kind</i>	<i>this kind</i>	<i>some kind</i>	<i>every kind</i>	<i>no kind</i>
possession	de ke (man)	de man ke...	de di (man)	de da (man)	de some (man)	de ale (man)	de nulo / de no man
	<i>whose?</i>	<i>whose...</i>	<i>this one's</i>	<i>that one's</i>	<i>someone's</i>	<i>everyone's</i>	<i>no one's</i>
place	ve / ke loke	ve / loke ke...	di (loke)	da (loke)	some loke	ale loke	no loke
	<i>where?</i>	<i>where...</i>	<i>here</i>	<i>there</i>	<i>somewhere</i>	<i>everywhere</i>	<i>nowhere</i>
time	ven / ke tempo	ven / tempo ke...	nun / di tempo	den / da tempo	some tempo	tuju / ale tempo	ni / no tempo
	<i>when?</i>	<i>when...</i>	<i>now</i>	<i>then</i>	<i>sometime</i>	<i>always</i>	<i>never</i>
manner	ke moda	moda ke...	di moda	da moda	some moda	ale moda	no moda
	<i>how?</i>	<i>how...</i>	<i>this way</i>	<i>that way</i>	<i>somehow</i>	<i>every way</i>	<i>no way</i>
cause	ke rason	rason ke...	di rason	da rason	some rason	ale rason	no rason
	<i>why?</i>	<i>why...</i>	<i>this reason</i>	<i>that reason</i>	<i>some reason</i>	<i>every reason</i>	<i>no reason</i>
quantity	ke mui	mui ke...	di mui	da mui	some mui	ale mui	no mui
	<i>how much?</i>	<i>amount which...</i>	<i>this much</i>	<i>that much</i>	<i>some amount</i>	<i>every amount</i>	<i>no amount</i>

Table of correlativesDemo i fini en ke tempo?

(At) *what time does the show end?*Demo i fini ven dika feme
i kanti.

*The show ends when the fat lady sings.*Mi tuju amo tu.
*I'll always love you.*Di rosa ke tu dona go mi i kote a ke
mui?

How much do these roses that you gave me cost?

In addition to the determiners listed in the table above, Mini uses
the following:

ani *any*
kada *each*
so *such*

Subordinating Conjunctions

Mini uses a few subordinating conjunctions for convenience:

ka *because*

se *if*

tamen *although*

vile *while* Vaku-man i kan mira a najima ka si ventana
i en punto eki de Tera.

*The spaceman can see the star because his window is
pointing away from Earth. Ka mi odi tu, mi senti sama en-i
open a aero-loka.*

*Because I hate you, I feel like opening the airlock. Se tu
open a mun, mi-ale i go e de-i suko en vaku.*

*If you open the door, we will be sucked into space. Tamen si
i go mori, si deside open a loka.*

*Although s/he will die, s/he decides to open the lock. Vile
tu open a loka, mi toma a mi fini nafasa.*

While you open the lock, I take my last breath.

Each of these conjunctions can be combined with *de* to function

as a compound preposition:

ka de *because of*

se de *whether*

tamen de *despite*

vile de *during* Ka de tu, mi no ave a sufi manja.

*Because of you, I don't have enough food. Mi i vole bibe a
kosa, se de bira, vino, u kafe.*

*I want to drink something, whether beer, wine, or
coffee. Tamen de mala manja, si i kipa go tamen a retorante.*

*Despite the bad food, he nevertheless keeps going to the
restaurant. Vile de evento, mi no bibe a ani kosa.*

During the event, I didn't drink anything.

Compound words

Compound words in Mini are formed by chaining consecutive words with a hyphen.

Compound words can make use of prefixes, infixes, and suffixes and are not bound by Mini's strict modifier semantics.

Single-syllable words in compounds are often not stressed when spoken.

Examples of compound words in Mini Mundo (in a random order):

pasa-pota	<i>passport</i>
anti-kapitala-idea	<i>anticapitalism</i>
bon-veni	<i>welcome</i>
regen-uti	<i>umbrella (rain-tool)</i>
en-mun, eki-mun	<i>entrance (in-door), exit (out-door)</i>
inventi-man	<i>inventor (invent-person)</i>
kinde-gaden	<i>kindergarten (child-garden)</i>
inveti-banka-man	<i>investment banker (invest-bank-person)</i>
en-move	<i>immigration (in-motion)</i>
semi-pota	<i>semiconductor (semi-carry)</i>
inta-neto	<i>internet</i>
mala-tira	<i>misfire (bad-shoot)</i>

ale-en-i-savi
bon-neso

omniscient (all-knowing)
goodness (good-ness)

Common words that can be used as affixes include:

ale-	all- / pan-
anti-	anti- / contra-
bon-	eu-
ego-	self- / auto-
eki-	ex-
en-	in- / en-
feme-	gyno- / she- / -woman
-fule	-full
gen-	re-
inta-	inter-
kan-	-able
kon-	con-
make-	-ify / -ize
mala-	dis-
-man	-er
mega-	mega- (augmentative)
mini-	mini- / -y / -ette (diminutive)
mui-	multi- / poly-
no-	un- / a-
-neso	-ness / -ity
-ranko	-th (ordinal)
semi-	semi- / half-
-siensa	-ology
-tenden	-tending / -inclined
-uti	-tool
veni-	become-
via-	trans-
viro-	andro- / he- / -man

Compound words have the same semantics as other words in

Mini and can be used as any part of speech:

Bisinesa-man i en-pota a 200 kilo-gama de vino-beri.
The businessman imports (in-carries) 200 kilograms of grapes (wine-berries). Gen-viva de no-mori bete i de kon-pasa kon ruina de si tumba.
The revival (again-life) of the undead beast coincided (with-happened) with the destruction of his tomb. Siensa-man i pensa ke raja-topi-viru i mebi ave veni de kave de vola-muso.
The scientist thinks the coronavirus (king-hat-virus) might have come from a bat (flight-mouse) cave.

Numbers

Mini uses a base-10 number system.

Numbers can be read off digit by digit or in a Chinese-like fashion by combining a digit with a power of ten.

nulo	0	
uno	1	
duo	2	
san	3	
fo	4	
penta	5	
sita	6	
seven	7	
ba	8	
nin	9	ten 10
sento	100	
kilo	1,000	
mega	1,000,000	
giga	1,000,000,000	
tera	1,000,000,000,000	37 san ten seven
136,789,000 sento san ten sita mega seven sento ba ten nin		
kilo /		

	uno san sita seven ba nin nulo nulo nulo
4.01	fo punto nulo uno / fo an uno de sento peso
2/3	duo de san peso
-42	meno fo ten duo ⁵⁺² penta an duo
6-3	sita meno san / san de sita
4/5	fo (de-i) divi (de) 5
3*9	san (en-i mui) kon nin
4^5	fo go (poten de) pentalst uno-ranko /
1-ranko	
2nd	duo-ranko / 2-ranko
73rd	seven-ten-san-ranko / 73-ranko
11:30 am	ten
uno san ten	ante senta
4:55 pm	fo penta ten penta afa senta
7 o'clock	7-ranko oraMonday dia 1
Wednesday	dia 3
Dec 5th	5-ranko dia de monato 12 / 5 de monato 12

Verb Tense

Mini verbs are tenseless by default but can be combined with auxiliary verbs to mark tense. Auxiliary verbs in Mini always precede the main verb.

Past	<i>de</i>	
Present	(none)	
Future	<i>go</i>	<i>Mega viro i de manja. The big man</i>
	<i>ate.</i>	<i>Mega viro i manja. The big man eats.</i>
	<i>viro i go manja. The big man will eat.</i>	

Copular and existential sentences can also mark tense using auxiliary verbs. (And since the auxiliary verbs are grammatically *verbs*, they use the particle *i*.)

Mega viro i de a mini viro.
man.I de a vasa.

*The big man was a small
There was water.*

To prevent ambiguity, the nominal copular future tense requires
the use of *veni* (become):

Mini viro i go veni a mega viro.
The small man will be a big man. Mega viro i go (veni) e
bon.
The big man will be good.

Verb Aspect & Mood

Auxiliary verbs can also be used to indicate aspect and modality:

Perfect	ave	
Progressive	en	
Habitual	pasa (used to)	Animale i ave manja. <i>The animal has eaten.</i>
		Animale i en manja. <i>The animal is eating.</i>
		Mi i go ave en manja. <i>I will have been eating.</i>
		Mi i pasa savi a feme. <i>I used to know the woman.</i>
	da	would (conditional)
debe	should	
ja	do (emphatic)	
kan	can, may, be able to	
mebi	might (possibility)	
nese	need to, have to	
vole	want to	Mi i da make a si, pero mi no kan. <i>I would do it, but I can't.</i>
		Si debe resi. <i>She should rest.</i>
		Si mebi kan go. <i>He might be able to go.</i>
		Mi ja kosina bon! <i>I do cook well!</i>

Verb Stacking

Mini verbs can stack to form compound verb phrases:

Mi kipa vole fini pale kon si.
I keep wanting to stop talking with him. Mi debe mebi ave
begin etudi a Mini.
I should maybe have started studying Mini.

Verb Phrase Word Order

Verb phrase order: i [no / pure adverbs] [auxiliary verbs]
[verb stack] [adverbs]

By default, the word ordering of verb phrases does not
distinguish between verbs and adverbs.

The particle *o* can be used to clarify that a word is being used as an
adverb.

Mi i begin rapi a karo.
I start to speed the car. Mi i begin o rapi a karo.
I start the car quickly.

Adverbs generally follow the verb, but otherwise retain the same
word ordering as other modifiers:

Mi pale rapi.
I talk quickly. Mi pale mui rapi.

I talk very quickly. Mi pale o mui o mui rapi.
I talk a lot very quickly.

In a compound verb phrase, a verb can be negated by preceding it with *no*. The particle *i* can be dropped if the first verb is negated.

Si i kipa no pale.
S/he keeps not talking. Si no kipa pale.
S/he does not keep talking.

Beside *no*, other “pure” adverbs can be fronted to the beginning of the verb phrase. These are non-contentful words like *tuju* (always) or *ankora* (still) that can be used unambiguously as adverbs. The particle *i* is usually then dropped.

Si ni pale rapi.
S/he never talks quickly. Mi ankora no savi sufi.
I still don't know enough.

The reduplicative or infinitive/participle form can be used to clarify that a word is being used as a verb (both forms are covered in depth in subsequent sections).

Mi i go (o) rapi.
I go quickly. Mi i go rapi-rapi.

*I will speed. Mi i go o mui rapi go-i manja.
I go very quickly to eat.*

Hortative & Optative

The word *lase* (let) can be used to indicate the hortative mood:

*I lase ke mi-ale i go! => Lase mi-ale go!
Let's go!*

For expressions of hope, the optative can be formed using *i da ke...*

*I da ke mi kan go a si fete!
Would that I could go to her party! I da ke raja i viva go
kilo ano!
May the king live a thousand years!*

Imperatives

To form the imperative for a verbal sentence, simply omit the subject:

<i>I go! => Go!</i>	<i>Go! I manja a tu veji!</i>	<i>Eat</i>
<i>your veggies! I no pale!</i>	<i>Don't talk!</i>	

For copular sentences, the verb *veni* (become) is used in the imperative:

I veni e bon! *Be(come) good!* I veni a Mini pale-
man! *Be(come) a Mini speaker!*

Null-Subject Sentences

The particles *a* and *e* can be used to form a sentence without a definite subject. (Note that this is not true for *i*.)

A vasa. *There is water.* E vasa. *It's wet.* A
man. *There is a person.* E kula. *It's*
cool.

Predicative, Resultative, & Ditransitive Verbs

Certain verbs in Mini (like *senti*, *make*, and *veni*) can be used with predicative adjectives. The particle *e* is used with these verbs:

Mi senti e bon. *I feel good.* Mi labora i veni
e su duro. *My work becomes too hard.*

Many predicative verbs in English are used with middle voice.

These are *not* translated as predicative verbs in Mini:

Si-ale i ave a raro aroma.
They smell weird. / They have a weird smell. Mi loke i ave a
mala mira.
My place looks bad. / My place has a bad appearance.

Ditransitive verbs can take two objects:

Mi i name a mini-feme a Alisa.
I name the girl Alice. Mi i an a si a mi seri.
I add it (to) my list.

Resultative verbs take an additional object or adjectival complement following or preceding the direct object to indicate a change of state.

Tu make a manja e mala.
You make the food bad.

Nonfinite Verbs

In English, nonfinite verbs like infinitives and participles can be used to discuss an action occurring outside the main clause of a sentence. Mini's nonfinite verbs operate in fundamentally the same way.

In English, infinitives are formed by the particle word *to* [verb], e.g. to eat, to work, to play, etc. Mini is the same: Infinitives can be formed using the compound word *go-i* followed by a verb (or *go-e* or *go-a* for the equivalent of *to be*):

Go-i mori a baka-pale-tori
*To kill a mockingbird (back-talk-bird)*Go-i go o poten a ke
no man i ave go ante
*To boldly go where no man has gone before*Go-i ero, e man.
Go-i padon, e deo.
*To err is human, to forgive divine.*Go-a bon man, e su duro.
To be a good person is too hard.

Unlike with infinitives, the English language does not use a particle word like “to” to form participles, but we could imagine what it would look like if it did: Instead of the word “writing”, this participle could be formed by a construction something like “in write.” The past participle “written” could be formed by something like “from write.” This is the approach Mini takes.

Mini has two types of participles, active and passive. Active participles can be formed using *en-i* followed by a verb, and are roughly equivalent to English words ending in *-ing*.

En-i no vasa a veji, a mala kosa.
*Not watering the plants is a bad thing.*Feme en-i manja a
pan i kite.
*The woman eating the bread leaves.*Animale, en-e su mega, i
unda.
The animal, being too large, falls.

Passive participles are formed using the compound word *de-i* followed by a verb and are roughly equivalent to English words ending in *-ed/-en*. As in English, the passive participle can be used to form the passive voice:

Mini a lingua de-i make.

Mini is a constructed language. Di buku e de-i note de mi.

This book is written by me. De-i kosina sama di, veji i ave a bon aroma.

Cooked like this, the vegetables have a nice aroma.

Infinitives and participles can use auxiliary verbs to mark tense:

Go-i ave viva bon, da a ke e impotan.

To have lived well, that's what's important. En-i ave go, mi vole go baka.

Having gone, I want to go back. Mui kinde i rondo a keki de-i go divi.

The children circle the to-be-divided cake.

Reduplicative Form

Mini is designed such that most words can function as any part of speech, but conjunctions and prepositions cannot often act as nouns, verbs, or modifiers without making sentences impossible to parse.

To use these words unambiguously for their non-conjunctive or non-prepositional meaning sometimes requires the use of their reduplicative form. This is created simply by repeating the word (with hyphenation):

Mi an kinde i go a demo.

I and a child go to the show. Mi an-an kinde i go a demo.

My additional child goes to the show. Ale sama-sama kosa i kipa pasa go mi.

All the same things keep happening to me.

Reduplication marks the word as a “semantically heavy” part of speech (noun, modifier, verb) versus a “semantically light” part of speech (conjunction, preposition, auxiliary verb), but is not always required. Consider the sentence:

Di duo kosa a sama.

These two things are the same.

The particle *a* marks the following word as a noun — no reduplication is necessary, even though *sama* normally functions as a preposition.

When used in the verb phrase, the reduplicative form indicates that the word in question is being used as a (non-auxiliary) verb:

Mi i vole an a si.
I also want it. Mi i vole an-an a si.
I want to add it. Mi i go vole a si.
I will want it. Mi i go-go vole a si.
I go willingly to it.

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More resources at minilanguage.com

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