Peace Corps

Setswana language lessons







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.

0 amogetswe mo puong ya Setswana!! Pula!

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Lesson 1: A Guide to Pronunciation

Alphabet	Like	Example
a	a in father	batho, people
b	<i>b</i> in <i>baby</i>	baba, enemies
ch	ch in church	chenchi, change
d	Debt	ditau, lions
е	ey in "they" or "a" in came	pele, first
(represents	e in begin	bina, dance
two sounds)	// N1 //	
ê	"e" in there	<i>êma</i> , stand
f	far	fêla, only
9	The sound made when you hawk	gana, refuse
	a lougie	
h	house	huma, be rich
i	ee in deep	bina, dance
j	j in jug	jwala, sow
k	k in kind	kima, thick
l	I in line	lela, cry/ weep
m	<i>m</i> in <i>me</i>	mena, fold
n	<i>n</i> in <i>name</i>	nama, meat
0	o in boat	Motse, village
(represents	A sound somewhat like <i>u</i> in <i>put</i>	Pelo, heart
two sounds) Ô	ou in ought	bôna, see
+	p in pain	pitse, horse
p ph	p (with aspiration) as in peach	phutha, fold
†	non existent	priutria, ioid
q		rôra proach
r	You just roll the "r" s in sit	rêra, preach simolola, start
t s	t in steak	setoto, carcass
th		
tl	t (with aspiration) as in take as in cluck	thusa, help
tlh		tla, come
+	(with aspiration) as in Sclerosis	tlhapa, wash/ bathe tshaba, run away
tsh	(with aspiration) like ts in mats	-
u	u in rude nonexistent	pula, rain
V		wâna vau
W	w in water	wêna, you
Х	an palatal click that is laterally released as in <i>nxe</i> , expressing sympathy	Nxau-xau, name of place in
_		Botswana
У	y in yet	tsamaya, go
Z	nonexistent	lish- Setswana Dictionary(Z.I. Matumo, 1993)

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

Lessen 6: Introducing Sen Semestic		
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	
o tswa kae? Ieina la gagwe ke Thabo sefane sa gagwe ke Thuto a o tswa kwa Amerika?	Where are you from? His name is Thabo His last name is Thuto Are you from America?	

Lesson 4: Leave- Taking Expression

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

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Lesson 5: Vocabulary 1 (Verbs)

Lesson 5: Vocabulary 1 (Verbs)	
Go- (word after slash represents the verb in its past tense form)	То-
kgôna / kgônnê	Able, be
gakolola / gakolotsê	Advise;remind
tshaba / tshabile	Afraid of, be
araba / arabile	Answer
gôrôga / gôrôgile	Arrive
botsa / boditse	Ask
kopa / kopile	Ask for (polite way)
tsamaya / tsamaile	Away, go ; travel
nna, ntse	Be, become
simolola / simolotse	Begin
dumêla / dumetse	Believe, agree
bedisa / bedisitse	Boil
adima / adimile	Borrow
tlisa / tlisitse)	Bring
	Burn
tshuba / tshubile	
fitlha / fitlhile	Bury
rêka / rêkile	Buy
bitsa / biditse	Call another person
kuka / kukile (lit. lift, when in its past form it means to help sb. carry)	Carry
palama / palame	Climb
tswala / tswetse	Close
tla / tlile,	Come
tsêna/ tsenye	Come in
tswa / dule,	Come out (emerge)
apaya / apeile	Cook
lela / ledile	Cry
bina / binnê	Dance
diêga / diêgile	Delay
senya / sentse	Destroy

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

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

Lesson 6: Some Useful Expressions

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

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

Lesson 7: Vocabulary 2 (Nouns)

Kitchen			
tafole	Table		
<i>setil</i> ô	Chair		
sejana	Plate		
kopi	Cup		
leswana	Spoon		
thipa	Knife		
<i>lefeêl</i> ô	Broom		
	Bedroom		
bolao	Bed		
kobô	Blanket		
diaparô	Clothes		
borokgwe	Pants		
ditlhako	Shoes		
General items			
pensele	Pencil		
buka	Book		
<i>b</i> ê <i>k</i> ê	Bag		
<i>p</i> ênê	Pen		
fensetere	Window		
lebati	Door		

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Lesson 8: Pronouns

nna	1
wêna	You
ênê	She/ he
rona	We/ us
lona	You (pl)
bônê	Them

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

- ✓ 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.

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	ka 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	

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 j ang ?	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	

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

Lesson 13: Expressing Needs

What do you want?
I want a candle
What do you need?
I need money
Where do you want to go?
I want to go home
What do you want to do now?
I do not know
How do you feel?
My head still aches
Why does she need a lot of money?
She needs to buy food and
clothes
Do you like coffee?
No. I don't like coffee
Where are you going tomorrow?
I want to go to the shops in the
morning

Lesson 14: Food Items

dijô	Food
mabêlê	Sorghum
phaletshê	Mealie-meal
sukiri	Sugar
letswai	Salt
metsi	Water
mashi	Milk
ditamati	Tomatoes
ditapole	Potatoes
mae	Eggs

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

Lesson 15: Family

Grand father
Grand mother
Father
Mother
Sister ; Brother
Older sibling
Younger sibling
Uncle (paternal)
Uncle (maternal)
Aunt (paternal)
Aunt (maternal)
cousin
Parents
Child/Children
Family

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Lesson 16: Adverbs of Time

Ecoson 10: Adverbs of Time	
gompieno	Today
maabane	Yesterday
kamoso	Tomorrow
maloba a maabane	The day before yesterday
maloba	Few days ago
beke e	This week
beke e e fitileng (lit. the week that passed)	Last week
beke e e tlang (lit. the week that is still to come)	Next week
ngwaga e	This year
ngogola ; ngwaga e e fitileng	Last year
ngwaga e e tlang	Next year
kgwedi e	This month

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

Lesson 17: Days Activities

I wake up at 6am
I bathe
And then I eat.
Then I go to school
I spent the day at school
we were doing a lot of things today
there were visitors from the Police
I was excited today
When I come back from school I rest.

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Lesson 18: Vocabulary 3 (Names of Places)

Places	English
Ntlo	House
Tlelase	Classroom
Thoelêtê	Toilet
Kitsi	kitchen
sekolo; sekole	School
Sepatela	Hospital
kokelwana	Clinic
shopo; lebênkêle	Shop
Poso	Post office
noka; molapô	River
Tshimo	Field
<i>K</i> êrêkê	Church
Banka	Bank
Kgotla	Customary court

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

Leader 16. Come Words With Similar Spenning But unforcing in meaning		
High tone	Low tone	
	✓	Sorghum
✓		Human breasts
	✓	To be tired
✓		Home
	✓	To pull
	✓	To smoke
	✓	To feel
	✓	To hear
	✓	To taste
	✓	Me
✓		To sit
✓		To bury
✓		To hide something
	✓	How many are there?
✓		Where are they?
	High tone ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	

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

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

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Lesson 21: Weather

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

Lesson 22: Health Expressions

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

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Lesson 23: Safety Expressions

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