

## Introduction

Zhisketh (natively *žskǎ*, “the clear [speech]”) is a language originally conceived to break as many of Greenberg’s linguistic universals as possible. Although at its present stage it does not necessarily do that, it still has a lot of unlikely idiosyncrasies that make it fun if rather implausible, such as its lack of vowels and unusual syntax and grammatical number system.

Zhisketh is thought to be spoken by humans (again, rather implausible). Working backwards from the lack of vowels, I figured its speakers lived in close quarters (they can’t shout long distances) in a quiet deciduous forest. A good deal of worldbuilding has been done around this Birch Forest and its Zhisketh-speaking inhabitants, as well as their society and material culture, most of which is contained within the vocabulary documentation.

## Phonology

### Consonants

Zhisketh has a basic inventory of 25 consonants. They consist of 7 plosives, 4 voiceless and 3 ejective, 3 nasals, 2 trills plus their voiceless variants as allophones, 8 fricatives, 3 voiceless and 4 voiced, one lateral approximant, and 4 affricates. Each consonant here is represented by its IPA value, then the official orthographic rendering if different, in <angle brackets>. Those in [brackets] only appear as allophones.

	labial	interdental	alveolar	postalveolar	dorsal	glottal
plosive	p pʼ		t tʼ		k kʼ	ʔ <ʼ>
nasal	m		n		ŋ	
trill			r [r]		R [R]	
fricative	f v	θ <ǎ>	s z	ʃ <š> ʒ <ž>	x	
lateral appx			l			
affricate	pf <pf>		tʃ <ts>	tʃ <č>	kx <kx>	

### Vowels

There are no phonemic vowels in Zhisketh. When spoken, epenthetic vowels may occur, often at the ends of words or before syllabic fricatives; however, this doesn’t mean there are vowels in the language’s inventory, as the quality of the vowels makes no difference phonemically.

### Stress

Primary stress usually falls on the first syllable of a word. In complex verb forms, where the first syllable is a conjugation of the copula and separated orthographically by a hyphen, the stress is on the first syllable of the original verb, after the copula form.

### Phonotactics

Syllables are divided into onset, nucleus, and coda. Any one consonant other than a plosive or affricate can serve as the nucleus. If multiple consonants that could serve as the nucleus appear in sequence, there is a hierarchy in which is more likely to be the nucleus:

Sonorant > voiced fricative > voiceless fricative

Additionally, the first consonant of a syllable cannot serve as a nucleus. The equivalent of a null onset at the beginning of a word is a glottal stop followed by the nucleus. This can form minimal pairs, as in *zžt* 'I (ergative)' and *'zžt* 'three leaves (ergative)'.

However, this glottal stop can be elided by liaison with a preceding word, ending in a segment other than a plosive. In sandhi, the final segment of the preceding word can lose its syllabicity, and it becomes the onset of the following glottal-onset word. This does not occur with words where the glottal stop is followed by the same fricative as ended the previous word. In poetry only, such sandhi can be selectively applied to words not beginning in glottal stop, removing the syllabicity of the last segment to fit the meter.

\***mR** 'n**st** \*[mR ʔnst]

> **mR nst** [mR\_nst]

and 1SG.ABS

and me

A sequence of a plosive and a homorganic (or nearly homorganic, see below) voiced fricative or sonorant is not found in Žskď and the plosive is resolved to a glottal stop when such a sequence arises by suffixing.

kŋ > 'ŋ, pm > 'm, tn > 'n

tz > 'z, tl > 'l, tď > 'ď, kR > 'R

When a glottal stop is added after a plosive, the sequence is pronounced as an ejective stop (/pʔ tʔ kʔ/ > [p' t' k']), including when the glottal stop arose from a plosive. This often happens in the feminine ergative form of nouns, since the transnumeral suffix -ď is appended to the feminine suffix -t.

A string of two fricatives, or an affricate then a fricative, of the same place of articulation, is illegal. If formed by morphology, the second will be deleted. For example, birch-GEN-TRN is underlyingly pŕRž-š-ď, but surfaces as pŕRžď, identical to birch-ERG-TRN, which is composed of pŕRž-ø-ď.

In a complex coda composed of a stop or voiceless fricative then a trill, the trill may be devoiced.

## Morphology

### Verbal Morphology

Finite verbs are conjugated for two basic tenses, with the copula used as an auxiliary to change aspect or add the irrealis mood, which is also used as a future tense. There is also an injunctive mood that does not mark tense. Other than in the injunctive mood, which shows no agreement, finite verbs always agree with the gender of the *absolutive* argument of the sentence, but the gender displayed in the verb is not always necessarily the inherent grammatical gender of the absolutive argument (this will be explained below). Verbal nouns (*gerunds*, which sometimes act like infinitives) and participles (which represent the absolutive argument of the verb, not specifying tense) can be derived from verbs, and they have their own declension patterns.

The basic tense + gender suffixes are:

	masculine	feminine	neuter
present	-ŋ	-R	-k

past	-n	-r	-t
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The suffix -m is used regardless of gender for an injunctive mood that can be used for any person.

As the copula, also used as an existential, is used, inflected, to form other tenses, aspects, and moods, plus it's irregular, here is its conjugation:

stem: zn- "be"	masc	fem	neut
present	zŋ	zR	zŋk
past	zn	zr	znt

Jussive: zm, Verbal Noun: zm-p, Participle: zŋ-x

### Explanation of verbal agreement

As stated above, the verb always agrees with the morphologically absolutive argument, even when it's not the topic. This can get somewhat confusing in transitive sentences, where the verb agrees with the patient, and with verbs of experiencing feelings with quirky subject "dative constructions", where the verb agrees with the cause of the experience, which is morphologically absolutive.

The gender of the agreement is also somewhat complicated, given that the neuter category does not correspond to any gender marked on the noun. With trial nouns, the verb is conjugated as neuter regardless of grammatical gender of a noun without natural gender, as masculine or feminine if all three individuals have the same corresponding natural gender, or as neuter in a group of mixed natural gender (i.e., two male organisms and one female organism or two female organisms and one male organism).

With transnumeral nouns: the verb is conjugated according to the grammatical gender of the first named noun (male or female), except in mixed groups of 2 or  $\geq 4$  people/animals, in which case the verb is conjugated as neuter. Collective nouns are considered their constituent parts, rather than a distinct entity. For example, although the word *tsŋftsǎ* (family) has feminine grammatical gender, it usually agrees with neuter gender on the verb, since families tend to have male and female members.

Neuter is also used for "dummy subjects", complement clauses, and in questions asking about something or someone of indeterminate noun class. When writing about real-life people who do not feel comfortable being referred to with masculine nor feminine morphology, neuter is recommended.

A more detailed look at the unique gender agreement system of Žskǎ appears in the conlang journal Segments, issue 2, pp. 119-121.

### Description of all TAMs

#### Present Tense

The present tense refers to anything that is currently happening, whether perfective or continuous, and whether it happens fully in the present moment or "has been happening" for a while. It has its own suffixes and does not use an auxiliary.

#### **k'vt spRtsǎ p'Rčz kslR.**

3SG-DAT pig-F.ABS-TRN white-ABS need-PRS.F

They (SG) need a white sow.

### *Past Tense*

The past tense is a simple past that can be perfective or imperfective but is separate from the perfect tense. It has its own suffixes and does not use an auxiliary.

#### **čvts k'v xntst.**

door-F.ABS-TRI 3PL.DAT open-PST.N

Three doors (were) opened for them.

### *Present Perfect*

The present perfect, or perfect tense, refers to an action completed in the past, especially as its results are relevant to the present. It is formed using the present copula then a past tense verb, both of which agree with the referent.

#### **pfRt'z spRš zž p'nfd žŋk-kšvtžt.**

large-ABS pig-ABS-TRI 1PL.ERG sir-DAT-TRN be-PRS.N-butcher-PST.N

Three great swine have we dressed for you.

### *Past Perfect*

The past perfect or pluperfect tense refers to an action further in the past than the past-tense frame of reference, especially as its results relate to the past frame of reference. It is formed using the past copula then a past tense verb, both of which agree with the referent.

#### **vs k'zt zr-krnvzr, k'vt zžt t'lžt.**

as-ABS 3SG-ABS be-PST.F-elect-PST.F 3SG-DAT 1SG.ERG tell-PST.N

I told her that she'd been promoted.

### *Nonpast Irrealis (Future Tense)*

The nonpast irrealis is used for nonpast clauses that are not indicative or are otherwise counterfactual, such as conditional or subjunctive; however, it is not used in conditionals that depend on an indicative clause (where the condition is considered possible but in question, rather than hypothetical). It is also used for future tense, as future tense is never considered truly indicative; thus, regular future, hypothetical future, and present future all look the same. This form is made from the copula conjugated for present and to agree with the referent, then the verbal noun in -p, uninflected for number or case.

#### **zv 'nst štmz smv zR-zmp, fz zžt Rsd žŋ-lzk'p.**

if 1SG.ABS tall-ABS.TRN more-ADV IRR.F.PRS=be then 1SG.ERG DIST-ABS-TRN IRR.M.PRS=grab

If I were taller, I would pick that thing up.

### *Past Irrealis (Future-in-the-Past)*

The past irrealis is a form with the same modality as the nonpast irrealis, but in the past. As such, it is also used as a relative tense for a future action from the perspective of the past. This form is made from the copula conjugated for past and to agree with the referent, then the verbal noun, uninflected for number or case.

#### **k'zt v kztsfd zr-kžkžp.**

3SG.ABS as deer-M.ABS-TRN IRR.F.PST=mimic

She was going to play the role of the deer.

### *Injunctive Mood*

The injunctive mood expresses a command or a desire. It can be directed at someone, working like an imperative, or at nobody in particular. It is marked by the suffix -m.

### Negation

Verbs are negated using the morpheme -l, suffixed after the tense and agreement. In the periphrastically constructed “complex tenses”, this negation goes on the verbal auxiliary. Phonetically, this suffix always takes syllabicity, even when following another sonorant. Furthermore, it causes a preceding stop consonant, as in neuter-agreeing verbs, to become ejective. These two complications can be explained by analyzing the morpheme as originally a separate word /ʔl/ that was regularly in sandhi with the preceding verb when ending in a sonorant, which would explain why it always takes syllabicity, and would explain the ejectives as a regular outcome of a plosive followed by a glottal stop.

### Nominal Morphology

Technically, nouns are declined for case, gender, and number, but all three agree with verbs a little weirdly, and the number system is rather awful.

### Case and Gender

Zhisketh has ergative-absolutive alignment, so its two most direct cases (in terms of relation to the verb) are ergative and absolutive. It also has a genitive and a dative case.

Zhisketh distinguishes two genders on nouns: male and female. Nouns with natural gender will have that natural gender as their grammatical gender. Things with no natural gender will be male or female, somewhat arbitrarily, although all feminine noun stems will end in t. A feminine stem may be a diminutive of a masculine stem.

The first declensional suffix on a noun is for case and gender:

case suffixes	masc	fem
absolutive	-s	-ts
ergative	-∅	-t
genitive	-š	-č
dative	-f	-pf

As the “feminine t” is considered part of the stem, the feminine case endings could be thought of as the same as the masculine suffixes, except the dative, which replaces the t with a p. Alternatively, one could think of the feminine suffixes as affricate versions of the masculine fricatives, except the ergative, which is -t in stead of -∅. Either way, a masculine stem ending in t (an exception!) would be conjugated identically to a feminine noun, but for the dative, which would end in -tf.

### *Absolutive case*

The absolutive case primarily represents the sole or main argument of an intransitive sentence or the direct object of a transitive sentence.

### **čvts k'v xntst.**

door-F.ABS-TRI 3PL.DAT open-PST.N

Three doors (were) opened for them.

**'rt čvtsď xntsR.**

3SG.ERG door-F.ABS-TRN open-PRS.F

They (SG) open the door.

The absolutive case is used for all direct arguments of a copula/existential, *zn-*.

**Skrtsď dštsď zR.**

this-F.ABS-TRN feather-F.ABS-TRN be-PRS.F

This is a feather.

The absolutive case is also sometimes used as a vocative.

**Mŋmŋtsď! 'nč kšvtsď đlkz zR 'm?**

mother-F.ABS-TRN 1SG-GEN bolo-F.ABS-TRN where-ABS be-PRS.F. particle

Mom, where's my cleaver?

*Ergative case*

The ergative case is mainly used for the agent of a transitive sentence.

**'nč tŋtŋď 'nst pžR.**

1SG-GEN father-ABS-TRN kiss-PRS.F

My father kisses me.

An ergative argument can be added to an intransitive sentence to make it transitive, often causative (see example for absolutive). As the ergative case + trial number is the most “unmarked” form of a noun, in practice identical to the noun stem, is it also used as the citation form of a noun.

**ďr** – *n. m.* A stone, a rock; the material stone; a kind of stone.

The literal gloss of **ďr** is “stone[ERG.TRI]”.

*Genitive case*

A genitive precedes its referent. Genitive case is used for: alienable and inalienable possession;

**'rs, 'nč čzčď đrs zŋk.**

yon-M.ABS[TRI] 1SG-GEN older.sister-F.GEN-TRN stone-ABS[TRI] be-PRS.N

Those are my sister's (3) stones.

composition with a solid material;

**kzŋ frŋšď Rrk'fd 'r 'nst mzžn.**

INS iron-M.GEN-TRN knife-M.DAT-TRN 3PL.ERG 1PS-ABS stab-PST.M

They stabbed me with knives of iron.

in replacement of the absolutive (never ergative) with a gerund or nominalized phrase;

**'nč mzžpď 'nst mrlvznl.**

1SG-GEN stab-[ERG]GER-TRN 1SG-ABS bleed.out-PST.M-NEG

I didn't bleed out from my wound.

or in compounds, e.g., **pfržďsnj**, birch-bark. In this case, the genitive -š is assimilated by the ž in **pfrž**.

### Dative case

The main two functions of the dative case are the indirect object in a tripartite sentence, in cases of giving and communicating; and as the object of a preposition.

#### **Mŋmŋ'đ čzpfđ đrsđ pfln.**

mother-F.ERG-TRN older.sister-F.DAT-TRN stone-ABS-TRN give-PST.M

Mother gave sister a stone.

#### **vs k'zt zr-krnvzr, k'vt zžt t'lžt.**

as-ABS 3SG-ABS be-PST.F-elect-PST.F 3SG-DAT 1SG.ERG tell-PST.N

I told her that she'd been promoted.

There is also the *dativus auctoris*, meaning “to” or “in the opinion/eyes of”;

#### **'nst čsđ p'nfd zŋ 'm?**

1SG-ABS older.brother-ABS-TRN sir-DAT-TRN be-PRS.M question.particle

Am I a brother to you?

And the ethic dative, “for [the sake, benefit of]”.

#### **pfRt'z spRs zž p'nfd zŋk-kšvtžt.**

large-ABS pig-ABS-TRI 1PL.ERG sir-DAT-TRN be-PRS.N-butcher-PST.N

Three great swine have we dressed for you.

The dative case is also used on units of time for what would be translated as an unmarked adverbial (or with “at”) in English.

#### **šksnd plmvz žxkfpđ lmvz przpfđ spfRđt.**

child-ABS-TRN calm-DAT-TRN find-DAT-GER-TRN previous-DAT-TRN night-DAT-TRN flee-PST.N

The children fled to a calm place last night.

### Dative constructions

Other uses of the dative case can be called “dative constructions.” Firstly, the dative of possession is used with a copula to express the existence of something in someone’s possession:

#### **k'vt čztsđ zR.**

3SG-DAT older.sister-F.ABS-TRN be-PRS.F

S/he has an older sister. (lit.: an older sister is to her.)

The dative is also used in a special way with the verb *vlk-*, to live somewhere, dwell, be home to:

#### **'mpf pfržđšprsđ vlkn.**

1SG-DAT birch-GEN-TRN-forest-ABS-TRN dwell-PRS.M

I live in the Birch Forest. The Birch Forest is home to me.

Other dative constructions are those in which the semantic role of an experiencer is put in the dative case and the cause of the experience in the absolutive case. There are a few different categories these fall into, such as:

Feeling temperature, e.g. “lž” cold:

**lžz 'mpf zŋk.**

cold-ABS 1SG-DAT be-PRS.N

It's cold to me.

ksl-, to need (or more literally, to lack); psv-, to want, etc.:

**k'vt spRtsō p'Rčz kslR.**

3SG-DAT pig-F.ABS-TRN white-ABS need-PRS.F

They (SG) need a white sow.

To love (slsl-), and similar verbs of personal evaluation, such as to hate, to like, to be infatuated with, to be in awe of:

**k'vt k'žt k'Rk'sđ slslŋ.**

3SG-DAT 3SG-ERG dog-M.ABS-TRN love-M.PRS

They (SG) love their dog.

**Number**

On all nouns except personal pronouns, Zhisketh distinguishes two numbers: transnumeral (TRN) and trial (TRI). The trial number is sometimes used as a paucal in casual speech, though this is considered ungrammatical. Trial is unmarked; a group of any other number is marked with the suffix -đ, which comes at the end of a noun, usually directly after the case ending. If a noun is derived from a verb, adjective, etc., the derivational affix will come after the case ending and before the number ending; this is called "derived declension." Personal names do not take the transnumeral suffix.

*Given that nouns are usually transnumeral, most nouns will end in -đ.*

**Pronouns**

Zhisketh has two types of pronouns: those which are declined like other nouns, and the others, consisting of 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person personal pronouns. These are marked for singular and plural number, unlike other pronouns.

**Personal Pronouns**

Case markings for plural vs singular personal pronouns (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person) are much like case markings for male vs female common nouns and other pronouns. There are not different forms for grammatical gender, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns can be used regardless of animacy. The ergative forms are suppletive. Possessive pronouns do not agree with what is possessed or anything like that; the genitive form is used.

personal pro.s	1SG	1PL		3SG	3PL
abs	'nst	'ns	abs	k'zt	k'z
erg	zžt	zž	erg	'rt	'r
gen	'nč	'nš	gen	k'žt	k'ž
dat	'mpf	'ŋf	dat	k'vt	k'v

There is no true second person pronoun. In many cases, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person interlocutor's name or title of address (including kinship terms, fictive or otherwise; see Pragmatics) can be used, negating the need for vocatives in some cases. The word *p'n* (feminine *p'nt*), originally meaning lord, master, sir, etc., can be used as a second person pronoun even in casual speech.

### Demonstrative Pronouns

Zhisketh has proximal (this here), medial (that there), and distal (yon) demonstrative pronouns. They have substantive (noun) forms that are declined as a normal noun and attributive (adjectival) forms that decline like an adjective, agreeing with the case of the modified noun. There are also substantive and attributive locative forms (i.e., there as opposed to that) of each of the three positions, although trial declensions of the substantive locative relative pronouns are not attested. Each of the three positions also has two adverbial forms: of direction (hither/thither) and of method (thus). This amounts to 38 distinct forms for each position or 114 in total, although some are the same as others or are rarely used.

The three demonstrative pronouns can also be used to refer to previous things mentioned in a conversation, like “the former” and “the latter”. More recently said things are represented by “closer” pronouns. However, the medial pronoun is more likely to be used for something that the 2<sup>nd</sup> person interlocutor said.

*The proximal root is skr-, the medial is štr, and the distal is 'R-. The suffixes are given here. The simple substantive and adjectival suffixes are the same as on common nouns, so this is a good place to check for case + gender + number suffixes.*

Demonstrative pronoun suffixes	Substantives			
	masculine		feminine	
Case	TRN	TRI	TRN	TRI
abs	-sď	-s	-tsď	-ts
erg	-ď	-∅	-’ď	-t
gen	-šď	-š	-čď	-č
dat	-fď	-f	-pfď	-pf
	Adjectivals			
	TRN		TRI	
abs	-z		-z	
erg	-z		-∅	
gen	-žz		-ž	
dat	-vz		-v	
	Locative			
	Substantive (always masc.)		Adjectival	
			TRN	TRI
abs	-ksď		-kz	-kz
erg	-kď		-kz	-k
gen	-kšď		-kžz	-kž
dat	-kfď		-kvz	-kv
	method adverb	-v		
	directional adverb	-kv		

### Interrogative Pronoun

The interrogative pronoun has the stem đl-. Its paradigm is similar to the demonstrative pronoun. As with the relative pronoun, prepositions precede it (not being pushed to the end of the sentence as in English). It is not necessarily fronted to the beginning of the sentence but can occupy such a place. If the interrogative pronoun appears in a declarative sentence rather than a question, it has a meaning like

“some” such-and-such or “whatever” such-and-such. There’s no difference in animacy when using interrogatives; that is, there’s no word for who as opposed to what.

Noun forms:

đl- (what)	transnumeral	trial (rare)
abs	đlsđ	đls
erg	đlđ	đl
gen	đlšđ (whose)	
dat	đlfđ (when)	đlf

Locative substantive forms:

case	đlk- (where)
abs	đlksđ
erg	đlkđ
gen	đlkšđ
dat	đlkfđ

Adjectival forms (declined to agree with case of referent)

đl- (which)	transnumeral	trial
abs	đlz	đlz
erg	đlz	đl
gen	đlžz	đlž
dat	đlvz	đlv

Locative adjectival forms:

đlk- (where)	transnumeral	trial
abs	đlkz	đlkz
erg	đlkz	đlk
gen	đlkžz	đlkž
dat	đlkvz	đlkv

Adverbial forms:

form	meaning
đlv	how
đlkv	whither

### Relative Pronoun

The preposition *v* can be used as a relative pronoun, declined for the case it's in within the relative clause with the regular masculine case suffix. It's not declined for gender or number, only case, and a preposition can precede it. See Syntax for more on *v* and declining it.

### Adjectives

Adjectives are declined for case and number (but not gender) to agree with the noun they describe. They consist of the stem + case + number. Most adjectives precede nouns, but adjectives of colour, shade, lustre, etc. come after the noun (see Syntax section).

adjective suffixes	transnumeral	trial
absolute	-z	-z
ergative	-z	-∅
genitive	-žz	-ž
dative	-vz	-v

Adjectives can be used on their own as substantives, declined as normal nouns. The meaning is like “the [adj.] one” or “that which is [adj]”.

Like nouns, adjectives can have derived declension (e.g., the participles); see Derivational Morphology.

### Adverbs

Adverbs always end with the suffix -v (the same as the dative trial adjective). This suffix can be put on an adjective to make it act as an adverb. They are not inflected to agree with the referent. An adverb can describe a verb or an adjective, coming after either.

### Numerals

Zhisketh uses a (partially) vigesimal, myriad-focused system, with complex numbers formed by concatenation. Cardinal numbers are determiners, so they use a similar declension to the adjectives but don't decline for number. Ordinal numbers are adjectives of derived declension with the affix -l-.

Adverbial numbers (once, twice, etc.) take the suffix -v.

Ordinal Numbers' declension	suffix	example: <i>xŋ</i> one
abs	-z	<i>xŋz</i>
erg	-∅	<i>xŋ</i>
gen	-ž	<i>xŋž</i>
dat	-v	<i>xŋv</i> (also once)

number	cardinal	ordinal	adverbial
1	<i>xŋ</i> , one	<i>xŋ-l</i> , first	<i>xŋv</i> , once
2	<i>št'n</i> , two	<i>št'n-l</i> , second	<i>št'nv</i> , twice
3	<i>(lvk')</i>	<i>lvk'-l</i> , third	<i>lvk'v</i> , thrice
4	<i>pfrR</i> , four	<i>pfrR-l</i> , fourth	<i>pfrRV</i>
5	<i>čl</i> , five	<i>čl-l</i> , fifth	<i>člv</i>
6	<td>		
7	<td>		
8	<td>		

9	<tbid>		
10	<i>Rď</i> , ten	<i>Rď-l</i> , tenth	<i>Rďv</i>
11	<i>Rďxŋ</i> , eleven	<i>Rďxŋ-l</i> , eleventh	<i>Rďxŋv</i>
12	<i>Rďšt'n</i> , twelve	<i>Rďšt'n-l</i> , twelfth	<i>Rďšt'nv</i> , a dozen times
20	<i>šrn</i> , twenty	<i>šrn-l</i> , twentieth	<i>šrnv</i>
30	<i>lvk'Rď</i> , thirty	<i>lvk'Rď-l</i> , thirtieth	<i>lvk'Rďv</i>
31	<i>lvk'Rďxŋ</i> , thirty-one	<i>lvk'Rďxŋ-l</i> , thirty-first	<i>lvk'Rďxŋv</i>
40	<i>št'nšrn</i> , two-score	<i>št'nšrn-l</i> , fortieth	<i>št'nšrnv</i>
1,00	<i>sm'</i> , one hundred		
10,00	<i>Rďsm'</i> , ten hundred		
20,00	<i>šrnsm'</i> , twenty hundred		
1,00,00 (10,000)	<i>p'lk'</i> , myriad	<i>p'lk'-l</i> , ten-thousandth	<i>p'lk'v</i>
10,00,00 (100,000)	<i>Rďp'lk'</i> ten myriad	<i>Rďp'lk'-l</i> hundred-thousandth	<i>Rďp'lk'v</i>

## Derivational Morphology

### Diminutives

Masculine nouns can be made into diminutives by placing the suffix -t- onto the noun stem; that is, making them female (think “kitchenette”). This cannot be done to nouns that already have a feminine counterpart due to natural gender, or masculine nouns with a stem ending in -t.

### Verbal Nouns

The verbal noun is a nominal form derived from a noun signifying the action of the verb, similar to a gerund in English. The verbal noun is made with the suffix “-p-”, which goes after the case suffix but before the number suffix (derived declension).

When a verbal noun is used in the dative case, especially with the preposition *tsl*, it works similarly to an infinitive:

**(Tsl) skržz mžpšď klfpď 'nts 'ŋkrn skrkv.**

(toward) this-GEN-TRN water-GEN-TRN pour<DAT>GER-TRN 1SG-ABS go-PST.M hither

I came here (in order) to pour this water.

When a verbal noun is used like a whole clause, with oblique arguments that have cases concerning the verbal noun rather than the greater clause, these go after the verbal noun, except absolutive, which becomes genitive and precedes it.

The verbal noun in the absolutive used with *žď*, to start, indicates the ergative argument “began to” do something.

### Participles

Participles are considered adjectives and are treated as such. They are derived with the suffix “-x-” in the derived declension shown. As with other adjectives, they become substantive nouns when noun affixes are used instead.

	transnumeral	paucal
abs	-xZ	-xZ
erg	-xZ	-x
gen	-žXZ	-žX
dat	-vXZ	-vX

### Other derivational suffixes

As above noted, an adjective can be used as an adverb using the adverb suffix -v rather than an adjective declension.

Abstract nouns are derived from adjectives with the derivational suffix -l- (derived declension). An abstract noun can be derived from a participle, though this is rare. The x goes before the l, both after the case ending.

A new verb stem can be derived by suffixing a preposition to a verb root. ž often makes it transitive or causative, sn implies being under or being not enough, vz indicates motion above or too much, etc.

### Syntax

Clauses essentially consist of noun phrase(s) and one verb phrase each, but this is not always the case.

### Word Order

Zhisketh is broadly SOV, but S and O can switch around a bit because Zhisketh is an ergative language, so “subject” and “object” don’t match up well in certain clauses. Word order can switch around to change focus and to smooth out relative clauses; Zhisketh can be somewhat topic-prominent, and relative or prepositional phrases are also sometimes fronted to keep the subject closer to the verb. This is not always seen, however.

### Noun Phrase

A basic noun phrase consists of these components in this order, each considered a separate word. All are optional other than the noun itself. Adverbs can only be present after adjectives they identify.

preposition	genitive	adjective	adverb	title	noun	colour adj.	adverb	demonstrative	numeral	relative clause
-------------	----------	-----------	--------	-------	------	-------------	--------	---------------	---------	-----------------

Determinatives can also be added to the genitive. Titles tend to only be concatenated with persons’ names, must agree with the noun in case, and include familial terms of address. p’n- can be used as a title, even for third-person referents.

Multiple adjectives, including “colour adjectives” (which also describe shade, lustre, etc.), are used in succession without a conjunction. If a noun phrase composes multiple of a list of nouns, the preposition mR is used, and nouns other than the first, agreeing with the first in case for a meaning like “and”, or in the dative case, for a meaning more like “with”.

An example of a phrase that fills all of those slots (except title):

**ž ’nč plmvz vrv stsnpfd ’mđrvz lrlrv skrvz pfrv vs žžt kflr...**

in 1SG.GEN calm-DAT-TRN true-ADV pool-F.DAT-TRN dark.blue.green-DAT-TRN deep-ADV this-DAT-TRN four-DAT REL-ABS 1SG.ERG flow-PST.F

In these my four very calm deep-grue pools which I poured...

### Verb Phrase

Verb phrases are significantly shorter than noun phrases. Each section given consists of one word; remember a verb may include the auxiliary *zn-* and the negative suffix *-l*.

verb part	adverb	question particle
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Question particles indicate a question (*'m*) or soften assertions and commands, like a tag question (*'n*).

### Complex Sentences

Certain combinations of clauses act like separate sentences connected by a conjunction, others relativize within the larger clause, and some combine into a limited form of serial verb construction.

### Relativizing with *V*

Relative and complement clauses are formed with the relative pronoun *v*. In both cases, *v* must be declined:

abs	vs
erg	v
gen	vš
dat	v*

\*The dative form can also be written *vf*, especially when transcribing directly from original Zhisketh texts; however, it's still pronounced the same either way.

In relative clauses, *v* takes the case of the role the head noun takes in the nested clause:

**zžt vžksđ [k'rk'd vžksđ pxŋn] vžln.**

> **zžt vžksđ vs k'rk'd pxŋn vžln.**

I man [dog bit man] saw

> I man that dog bit saw

I saw the man whom the dog bit.

In complement clauses, *v* is declined for the role it takes as a nominal in the larger sentence:

**vs žmđ đrsđ zŋ-šmn zžt vžlk.**

as-ABS younger.brother[ERG]-TRN stone-ABS-TRN PRF-PRS.M-put.down-PST.M 1SG.ERB see-PRS.N

I see that you've put down stones, brother.

### Coordination and Conditionals

Other conjunctions work to combine whole sentences one after the other according to the meaning of the conjunction.

**'rt t'nžsđ zŋ-k't'fsnp, Rv zŋ-k'Rmp, zv k'msđ k'vt tsl fsRpfđ zŋk'l-pflp.**

3SG.ERG world-M.ABS-TRN IRR.M.PRS=destroy after IRR.M.PRS=wake if person-M.ABS-TRN 3SG.DAT on altar-F.DAT-TRN IRR.N.PRS-NEG=give

He will destroy the world after he wakes up if people are not sacrificed to him (lit., given to him at the altar).

If-clauses and when-clauses can also precede the main clause; in the former case, *fz* “then” is sometimes used between the protasis and apodosis.

#### **zv 'nst štmz smv zR-zmp, fz zžt 'Rsđ zŋ-lzk'p.**

if 1SG.ABS tall-ABS.TRN more-ADV IRR.F.PRS=be then 1SG.ERG DIST-ABS-TRN IRR.M.PRS=grab

If I were taller, so I would pick that thing up.

To indicate that multiple actions took place in sequence or one because of another, *fz* is used. The preposition *mR* “with, and” is used to join noun phrases but *never* verb phrases. Multiple VPs that are equally true are expressed as separate sentences rather than being joined by a coordinating conjunction.

#### Serial verb constructions

If multiple verbs have the same noun-phrase arguments, they’re strung together, rather than being separated by a conjunction. The two verbs are always conjugated the same.

#### **'rt spRsđ ŋvđn kšvtžn.**

3SG.ERG hog-ABS-TRN kill-PST.M butcher-PST.M

S/he killed and butchered a pig.

#### That-Which Constructions

To express the idea of all things or all people for which something is true, two pronouns have to be used: one of which indicates the case of the noun within the broader clause and the other which indicates its role in the subclause. This is done using the interrogative pronoun *đl* followed by the inflecting relativizer *v*.

#### **đlsđ svR'z zŋk 'm? đlsđ vf k'mšđ sčRđ trzk.**

who-M.ABS-TRN intelligent-ABS.TRN be.N.PRS Q who-M.ABS-TRN REL-DAT person-M.GEN-TRN all-TRN learn-N.PRS

Who is wise? One who learns from every person (*Pirkei Avot* 4.1).

#### Expressing “only”

There is no quantifier “only” in Zhiskeith. There is, however, a common construction using a negative verb and the conjunction *čzv* ‘except’, similar to the *ne... que* construction in French or the *ilā... ilā* construction in Arabic.

Since verbal nouns cannot be negated, this construction is used with complement clauses instead.

#### **vs k'msđ zŋl-t'žlp čzv tsl k'ž pxrfđ smrnz zŋk.**

COMP-ABS person-M.ABS-TRN IRR.M.PRS-NEG=think except about 3SG.GEN self-M.DAT-TRN cruel-ABS.TRN be.N.PRS

Only thinking of yourself is cruel (literally, that one should not think except about themselves is cruel).

#### The Focus Particle Čx

The word *čx* is an uninflecting proclitic particle that can be added to a word or phrase to draw focus and express that it’s unexpected, surprising, or important. This can sometimes be translated as “even”, or it can be left untranslated when used for emphasis.

## A Note on Valency

Zhisketh doesn't really have passives nor antipassives. A normally intransitive sentence can become transitive just by adding an ergative argument. A normally intransitive can become antipassive by leaving out the absolutive, or passive by leaving out the ergative.

## Pragmatics

### Terms of address

As mentioned above, *p'n-* is not always used as a second person pronoun (and accompanying vocative); this is a somewhat formal thing to do. Various familial terms and other titles are used instead depending on the context. Sometimes the person's name or title will be fitted in and no second person used at all.

This table shows a few common fictive kinship terms and when they might be used:

word	meaning	context/use
čz(t)	older sibling	slightly older or more respectable peers, older friends or lovers
žm(t)	younger sibling	slightly younger or lower-rank peers, younger friends or lovers, (very informal) any friends, anyone
čŋčŋ(t)	older aunt/uncle	(polite but informal) older people, especially strangers