

Syntax

Word Order:

Word order in Nikaskan is subject, object, verb (SOV), but the case system allows for some freedom for nonconfigurationality. The language tends to be head-initial, and is pro-drop. For example, noun modifiers like adjectives follow the noun that they accompany, but demonstrative particles always appear before the noun. Adverbs can follow or precede the main verb, and can take almost any position in a clause; however, in standard speech and prose adverbs usually follow the verb.

Copulae:

Nikaskan has a zero-copula construction system for identifying, naming, or describing noun phrases. The copula subject is always in the nominative case, and in the present tense the copula predicate is always in the accusative case. For example:

átilon háčár

hole-nom.sg.in bottomless-acc.sg.in

The hole is bottomless

It should be noted that this zero-copula construction is only used for the purposes listed above. Constructions of location, position, or accompaniment that would use the English verb *to be* along with any preposition do not function with a zero-copula in Nikaskan. For example, it is not grammatical to say **átilon jákom** to mean *the hole is in the sand*. In these cases, a separate verb is used, the equivalents of *to sit*, *to stand*, or *to lie*.

The future and past tenses also utilize this zero-copula. In the absence of a verb, tense is shown through the case of the copula predicate. In the future tense, the predicate is in the dative case, while, in the past tense, it appears in the nominative. In the past tense, when the predicate is an adjective and the subject is a noun with at least one other adjective already modifying it, the predicate is fronted to disambiguate. In other situations it follows the subject. For example:

átilon háčáron	<i>the hole was bottomless</i>
šántiton átilon háčáron	<i>the bottomless hole was dark</i>
átilon hačarí	<i>the hole will be bottomless</i>
átilon hačaron šántití	<i>the bottomless hole will be dark</i>

The distal tense does not follow this same pattern of syntactical constructions. In the distal tense, and *only* in the distal tense, there is a verb copula used for describing, identifying, naming, or attribution. This distal copula is the most irregular verb in Nikaskan, and its forms are:

	Singular	Plural
1st Person	nol	makrá
2nd Person	nas	nektá
3rd Person Animate	eprá	eppais
3rd Person Inanimate	eppú	eppútá

Nol acts as a transitive verb, meaning the subject is marked nominative and the predicate is marked accusative. The verb also breaks regularity by always preceding the copula predicate. This is the only time that Nikaskan syntax requires SVO word order. For example:

úkkepám eprá abrákit

sun-nom.sg.an be.3s.an.dist bright-acc.sg.an

The sun was bright long ago / The sun will be bright in the distant future