

# Introductory Lesson

Zdetl is the official language used throughout the Zhodani Consulate in the age of the Third Imperium. While its precise origins are unknown, it is commonly accepted that it developed in the wake of the Final War when the surviving humans on Zhdant found themselves bereft of their Ancient masters for the first time. Over the millennia, Zdetl evolved gradually into its modern form, which was universally adopted as the official language in the 300<sup>th</sup> Olympiad, the Imperial year -6055<sup>1</sup>.

A distinguishing feature of modern Zdetl is its emphasis on standardization in morphology, grammar, syntax, and structure. Zhodani culture is fundamentally assimilative in nature; in other words, the Consulate is not interested in conquest by force but by acculturation. To this end, the Consular language has been simplified over time to make it easy to teach and learn (or at least less difficult than other languages). This does not mean that Zdetl lacks complexity – like the ancient Terran game of Go, its fundamentals can be learned in minutes, but it can take a lifetime to truly master, and few non-native speakers ever reach that level.

## Characteristics of Zdetl

Most languages can be divided into three major parts:

1. Vocabulary, the collection of words that makes up the language
2. Spelling and Pronunciation, the sounds (also known as phonemes) that combine to form syllables, words, and phonological phrases
3. Grammar, Syntax, and Word order

In each of these areas Zdetl displays major simplifications when compared to other modern languages.

*Spelling and Pronunciation* have been standardized and are phonetic in nature. Each of the major phonemes has a single symbol associated with it, and each letter has one sound. There are no “silent” letters; if a phoneme is unvoiced, it is not written.

*Vocabulary* has been regularized as much as possible. There are fewer “loan words” than in many Terran languages (and even in Imperial Bilandin);

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<sup>1</sup> [Zdetl \(language\) - Traveller \(travellerrpg.com\)](http://Zdetl%20(language)%20-%20Traveller%20(travellerrpg.com))

one function of the **Tavrchedl** (the Zhodani “Guardians of Morality” – the so-called “thought police” that monitor Consulate society) is to track linguistic developments and either assimilate or remove them from the social vocabulary as needed. New concepts that may lead to subversive thought are subtly but efficiently erased from the national consciousness.

The new student will observe that Zdetl uses many compound word forms. Most commonly these are nouns modifying nouns; as in Anglic the modifying noun comes first, then the main noun last<sup>2</sup>. Zdetl makes widespread use of *affixatives*, which are usually Locative<sup>3</sup>, Lative<sup>4</sup>, and Comparative<sup>5</sup> in nature. There are many others; they will be addressed in later lessons.

*Grammar and Word Order* in Zdetl is unusual compared to most Terran languages. In Zdetl, sentences follow the structure *Object – Verb – Subject – Indirect Object(s)*<sup>6</sup>.

Unlike other languages, Zdetl does not have “gendered” nouns or pronouns. There is a single third-person singular pronoun – **se** - that is used regardless of the gender of the individual or creature it refers to. This simplifies interactions with gender-fluid or gender-nonconforming humans and monogendered or multigendered non-human species. Concepts such as “mother” and “father” exist but are not limited linguistically to specific genders; similarly, Zdetl does not differentiate between male and female professionals.

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<sup>2</sup> [Zdetl \(language\) - Traveller \(travellerrpg.com\)](#) - Morphology

<sup>3</sup> [Locative case - Wikipedia](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Lative case - Wikipedia](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Comparative case - Wikipedia](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Zdetl \(language\) - Traveller \(travellerrpg.com\)](#) - Syntax

# Lesson 1: Pronunciation & Spelling

As discussed in the previous section, Zdetl is a highly regularized language with consistent spelling, phonetics, and pronunciation. There are no silent letters and no “irregular” spellings, and all letters (**tlotani**) have one sound and symbol.

The phonemes (sounds) of Zdetl are differentiated and distinct and follow predictable patterns. Multiple vowels rarely appear together, and syllables consist of Vowel (V), Consonant-Vowel (CV), Vowel-Consonant (VC) or Consonant-Vowel-Consonant (CVC) groupings.

Words are accented, and the placement is usually predictable. The accent usually falls on the penultimate syllable. If the word is two syllables, the accent falls on the final. In the case of longer words there may be a secondary accent on the first syllable.

The Zdetl alphabet (**tlotanitl**) consists of 42 distinct phonemes: seven vowels and 35 consonants. Eight of the consonants are combinations of the “N” phoneme plus another letter sound; unlike the other letters these do not have their own glyph but are written as a glyph pair.

The vowel sounds are as follows:

Ɱ A as in “lock” or “father”, never as in “pale”: *atrint*, **Ah-trint**;  
driant, **dri-Ahnt**

Ɱ E as in “get” or “let”, never as in “pier”: *echtovr*, **EHch-tovr**;

Ɱ I as in “kit”, never as in “mile”: *ivr*, **IHvr**; *izhtak*, **IHzh-tak**

Ɱ IA as in “**y**ank”: *iavchieql*, **Yav-chiegl**; *iatepcha*, **Ya-tep-cha**

Ɱ IE as in “**l**ayer”: *iebr*, **Ye-br**

Ɱ O as in “go”: *ibro*, **i-brO**; *otre’*, **O-tre’**

Ɱ Ĥ is a throaty “r” sound similar to the “r” in “work” as shown in Appendix E. This one can be challenging to learn and recognize in Anglicized Zdetl; students should listen to its spoken form in the footnote and practice saying it often. It will be noted in the Anglicized text as “ĥ” where appropriate.

Don’t make the vowel sounds too long. “Atrint” and “driant” in the examples above have short, clear “a” sound; all vowels should be pronounced as clearly and purely as possible.

The consonant sounds are as follows: B, BL, BR, CH, D, DL, DR, F, FL, FR, J, K, KL, KR, L, M, N, NCH, NJ, NS, NSH, NT, NTS, NZ, NZH, P, PL, PR, Q, QL, QR, R, SH, T, TS, TL, V, VL, VR, Z, ZH, ZHD

They are pronounced like the Anglic phoneme and combinations, except for Q, which is a softer “K” sound like a combination of “K” and the Anglic “G” sound. The closest Terran approximation is the Arabic “Q”. The last consonant on the list is a glottal stop or sudden vocal pause. There are no alternate or secondary pronunciations of any letters, as is commonly seen in Terran Anglic.

Pronunciation of the consonant forms is as follows:

- 𐌲 B as in Anglic “boy”: *baz*; **Baz**; “barbarian”
- 𐌲𐌳 BL as in “blue”: *achabl*, **ach-aBL**
- 𐌲𐌳𐌹 BR as in “brood”: *dlabre’*; **dla-BRe’**
- 𐌹𐌺 CH as in “child”; never hard as in “kick”: *echtovr*; **eCH-tovr**
- 𐌲𐌴 D as in “dog”: *dizh*; **Dizh**
- 𐌲𐌴𐌹 DL as in “paddle”: *dlabre’*; **DLa-bre’**
- 𐌲𐌴𐌹𐌺 DR as in “dry”: *driejabr*; **DRie-jabr**
- 𐌴 F as in “far”; never a “v” as in “of”: *fevranzh*; **Fev-ranzh**
- 𐌴𐌹 FL as in “fly”: *flietavrian*; **FLie-tav-rian**
- 𐌴𐌹𐌺 FR as in “free”: *fronzh*; **FRonzh**
- 𐌵 J as in “jump”: *jiavr*; **Jiavr**
- 𐌵𐌹 K as in “kite”: *kaz*; **Kaz**
- 𐌵𐌹𐌺 KL as in “cling” or “wrinkle”: *kliazh*; **KLiazh**
- 𐌵𐌹𐌺𐌹 KR as in “cry” or “cracker”: *kral*; **KRal**
- 𐌺 L as in “long”: *lienj*; **Lienj**; “wind”
- 𐌺𐌹 M as in “many”: *mazhde’*; **Mazh-de’**
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺 N as in “never”: *nad*; **Nad**; “a person who does something”
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹 NCH as in “crunch”: *Dlenchiepr*; **dieNCH-iepr**; “Intendant”
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺 NJ as in “exchange”: *lienj*; **lieNJ**; “wind”
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹 NS as in “dans macabre”: *rans*; **raNS**; “hate (n)”
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺 NSH as in “n + sh”: *tavrziansh*; **ta-vř-ziaNSH**; “Morality’s Path”
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹 NT as in “can’t”: *Zhdant*; **zhdaNT**; The Zhodani homeworld
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌹 NTS as in “pants”: *yentschapo*; **yeNTS-cha-po**; “bacon”
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌹𐌹 NZ as in “cans”: *Ninz*; **niNZ**; A class of 100-ton scout ships
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌹𐌹𐌹 NZH as in “binge” or “fringe”: *dranzh*; **draNZH**; “sun”
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹 P as in “cap”: *piapr*; **Piapr**; “thaw”
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌹 PL as in “play”: *Pliebr*; **PLiebr**; the primary GOV star of the Zhdant system
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌹𐌹 PR as in “pray”: *piapr*; **piaPR**
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌹𐌹𐌹 Q is like the Terran Arabic Q, which is a glottal hard “G” as in “Qatar”: *qiets*, **Gi-ets**
- 𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌹𐌹𐌹𐌹𐌹 QL as in “glue”: *qlome’*, **GLo-me’**

S QR as in “grown”: *tliagre'*, **tli-a-GRe'**  
 R R as in “run”: *rans*, **Rans**; “rain”  
 L S as in “sun”: *stial*, **Stial**; a day on Zhdant, about 27 hours  
 SH SH as in “shut”: *shiv*; **SHiv**; “moon”  
 SH C SHT as in “Ishtar”: *shtefrabr*; **SHTe-frabr**; “father”  
 L C ST as in “stop”: *stebre'*; **STe-bre'**;  
 C T as in “tall”: *tozjabr*; **Toz-jabr**;  
 C TL as in “atlas”: *pranatl*; **pran-aTL**; a minor Noble, “aspirant”  
 C TR as in “train”: *atrint*; **a-TRint**; “raining,” the wet season on Zhdant  
 C TS as in “sets”: *qiets*; **qieTS**; “swift”  
 C V as in “very”: *viaj*; **Vyaj**; “yes” or “truth”  
 C VL as in “Vland”: *vlezhd*; **VLezhd**  
 C VR as in “vroom”: *vrien*; **VRien**; “heat”  
 C Y as in “yet”: *yonchobo*; **Yon-cho-bo**; a draft animal native to Zhdant  
 C Z as in “zoo”: *zar*; **Zar**; “trek”  
 C ZD as in “Thursday”: *Zdetl*; **ZDetl**; the official language of the Zhodani  
 C ZH as in “measure”: *Zhodani*; **ZHO-da-ni**  
 C ZHD as in “zh + d”: *Zhdant*; **ZHDant**, *vlezhd*; **vleZHD**  
 ^ ^ is a glottal stop or a soft pause between syllables.

Students of Zdetl will note that many of the consonants and vowels combine to form *diphthongs* and *triphthongs*, and many consonants combine with ‘R’ and ‘L’ sounds as a single letter. This can sometimes cause confusion for students when it comes to written Zdetl.

Practice pronunciation by learning the names of the seasons:

Atrint (*ah-trint*) = “raining,” the wet season following the winter thaw

Vrienstia (*vryen-styal*) = “heat,” the summer season

Atchafser (*at-chaf-ser*) = “waning,” the time of the year when the summer’s heat fades

Ataniebl (*a-tan-yabl*) = “harvest,” the season on Zhdant to harvest mature crops

Ashtia (*ash-tyavl*) = “chill,” the freezing winter season

Atpiapr (*at-pyapr*) = “thaw,” when the freezing winter wanes and becomes more temperate

## Numbers

For additional practice, learn the numbers as well:

1 = <i>chial</i> (chyal)	6 = <i>kiachti</i> (kyach-ti)
2 = <i>omei</i> (oh-myeh)	7 = <i>komi</i> (ko-mi)
3 = <i>tyeii</i> (ty-yeh-i)	8 = <i>koe</i> (ko-e)
4 = <i>nachoie</i> (na-cho-yeh)	9 = <i>kona</i> (ko-na)
5 = <i>machieli</i> (ma-chyeh-li)	10 = <i>matlapa</i> (ma-tla-pa)
100 = <i>chien</i> (chyen)	1000 = <i>matlachien</i> (ma-tla-chyen)
0 = <i>topa</i> (to-pah)	

Higher numbers can be formed from the ones above:

11 = *matlachial*

12 = *matla<sup>^</sup>omei* (note the ^ between the words)

13 = *matlatyeii*

14 = *matlanachoie*

... and so on. Multiples of ten are formed by prepositioning the appropriate ordinal in front of *matlapa*:

20 = *omeimatlapa*

30 = *tyeimatlapa*

31 = *tyeimatlapachial*

Practice these by working out any number you choose.

## Exercises

1. What is the number of your house? Your street? Your neighbors' houses? Your phone number?
2. Transcribe the following dates into Zdetl:
  - a. 300 (the year Zdetl was standardized)
  - b. 404 (the year the Consulate was established)
  - c. 584 (when the Jump Drive was discovered)
  - d. 2978 (founding of the Third Imperium)
  - e. 3239 (beginning of the First Frontier War)
  - f. 1207 (First Core Expedition)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> From Mongoose Traveller Alien Module 4: Zhodani, p. 74