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More Than “Good”:

Feeling **šes** and **šas**

A doorway into how Salish recognizes condition

*A public-facing **exploration** of how the **šs** family holds more than one kind of “good,” and how the vowels help shape how that condition is felt.*

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## Purpose

To help readers hear and feel the difference between **šes** and **šas** as part of the wider **šs** family, and to show that Salish can distinguish not only whether something is good, but what kind of good it is.

This document is for learners, teachers, and curious readers who want a usable doorway into the vowels of the **šs** family through familiar words, place words, animal words, and everyday expressions.

## Research arc in brief

*This document follows a simple but important shift: from hearing **šs** as one general English “good,” to feeling how **šes** and **šas** shape different kinds of goodness — **šes** as lived or present condition, and **šas** as a more marked, weighty, or salient condition of good.*

## Opening

Many learners first meet **šes** and **šest** through English words like good, fine, beautiful, or well. That is useful, but it can also make the family seem flatter than it really is. In Salish, the



**ǰs** family does not only give one kind of “good.” It lets us feel different ways that goodness stands, shows up, or matters.

In a recent conversation with ʔəsɯəli, Zalmai Zahir, a valued member of the Lushootseed language community and a linguist, one comment stood out. He said that the vowel **a** in Lushootseed carries a feeling of importance. He did not frame it as a finished theory, but as something he could sense. That matters here, because many learners can feel that the vowels are doing more than just filling out the word, even before they know exactly how to explain it.

The root word **ǰs** points toward a fitting, workable, well-configured condition — something standing in a way that works. From there, the vowels help shape how that condition is felt. This document follows that difference as a way into the broader worldview inside the **ǰs** family.

## Grounding the family

The **ǰs** family becomes most familiar through forms that feel easy to translate: **ǰest**, **ǰes**, a good morning, good weather, good taste, good feelings, a good job. That familiarity is real, but it can also hide the family’s inner distinctions. If English “good” settles in too quickly, the family can begin to look smaller and more settled than it really is.

What the family keeps returning to is not simply praise or approval. It keeps returning to fittingness, effectiveness, agreeable condition, and something standing well in relation. Once that broader field is felt more clearly, the vowels start to matter more. They do not only change the sound. They help shape how the condition is felt.

Form	Working feel	What it suggests
<b>ǰs</b>	good; fitting; workable	The grounding family sense: a condition standing in a way that works.
<b>ǰes</b>	well; good; fine	Goodness as lived, present, and felt in experience.
<b>ǰas</b>	significant good state	Goodness as weightier, more marked, and more recognized.

## ǰes: goodness as lived condition



**ḡes** is often heard as well, good, or fine. It has the feel of goodness as it is being lived, felt, or present in experience. That is why speakers use it in ways that English often translates as “well” rather than simply “good.” When an elder explains the phrase more as “I am well” than “I am good,” that is an important clue. The word is not only evaluating the person in the abstract. It is describing their present condition: not sick, not down, not tired, not unwell.

This is one reason **ḡes** is such an important doorway. It helps learners feel that the family is not only about judgment. It is about condition. It is about how alignment is presently lived or carried. That is why the form works so naturally in wellness, ordinary checking-in, and in ways that point toward a condition standing well right now.

Salish	Useful feel / translation
y čn ḡes	I am well.
ha y kʷ ḡes	Are you well?

## ḡas: goodness that stands out

**ḡas** carries a stronger sense of goodness that stands out as important, weighty, or recognized. It is not just that something is fine in the moment. It matters in a more marked way. It has salience. The goodness is more settled, more notable, and more consequential.

That does not mean moral goodness in a simple English sense. It means something closer to a condition whose goodness has more weight to it. A being, plant, or thing can be recognized through a more marked, more important, or more salient good condition. That is one of the reasons the a-vowel can feel different even before it is fully explained.

Form	General sense	Why it matters here
ḡas	significant good state	A more marked and weighty way of being good.
sḡaslqs	moose	<b>ḡas</b> , naming a more salient outwardly fitting condition; often glossed “good clothes,” but likely preserving a deeper visible or functional salience beyond the surface gloss ‘good clothes.
ḡasḡs	lovage	Shows a valued plant emerging from the same broader field.



## Animals as a bridge

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Staying with animals helps the difference come further into view. In the earlier animal work, **x<sup>w</sup>yx<sup>w</sup>ʔyuł**, “animals,” opened a broader way of seeing beings through patterned life and movement. Here, **s̘aslqs**, “moose,” gives another kind of doorway.

The common gloss sometimes given for **s̘aslqs** is “good clothes.” That gloss is useful because the ending **-lqs / -alqs** is strongly associated with clothing, shirt, dress, or outward worn form. But in root-calculus terms, the word may be pointing to something deeper than clothing alone. The form suggests an outwardly visible, functionally fitted, purpose-shaped condition — something that stands out as properly formed for what it does.

That is where **ǰas** matters. The word does not simply point to something being “good” in a light or passing way. It carries a stronger sense of goodness that stands out as important, weighty, recognized, and more settled. The goodness has salience. It matters.

In **s̘aslqs**, that more marked good condition may help name the moose as a being recognized through its striking outward fitness. The familiar gloss “good clothes” may preserve one surface branch of the meaning, since the form overlaps with clothing and outer covering. But the deeper orientation may be broader: a being whose outer form is notably fitting, well-shaped, and visibly right for its way of moving and living in the world.

This is one reason the moose matters here. It shows that the **a** vowel is not only an abstract contrast. It reaches into how beings can be recognized through a more salient and consequential condition. The moose is not simply another example added for variety. It helps show how a being may be named through a marked good state — one that is seen, felt, and recognized in its outward form.

## Why ǰest matters so much

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This also helps explain why **ǰest** is such an important general form. It is common enough that many learners simply gloss it as “good.” But once **ǰes** is felt more clearly, **ǰest** can also be heard as a good state, a fine state, a beautiful state, or a condition standing in a good way. That is why it works so naturally in greetings, evaluations, and ordinary speech.

Part of what makes **ǰest** so important is that it sits at a place where learners begin to move beyond memorized translation and start hearing how Salish organizes condition. In English, “good” can be used almost anywhere, so it is easy to assume that **ǰest** is simply the same kind of word. But in Salish, the form does more than label something positively. It presents that goodness as a state that stands, holds, and can be recognized. That is why it feels so natural in public expressions. It names not just approval, but condition.



One thing that can be confusing for learners is that several forms may all be translated in English with “good,” even though they are built differently. They are not all saying the same thing. They show different ways a good condition can be present: as a current condition, as a settled state, as a maintained state, or as a state actively continuing or changing.

**y čn ŋes** has more of the feel of a current condition: *I am well, I am doing okay, I am in good condition right now*. The goodness is presently holding. **čn ŋest**, by contrast, is stative: *I am good, I am in a good state*. Here the goodness is presented as a state in itself. That is one reason **ŋest** matters so much. The suffix **-t** already builds the state into the word, so it can stand very naturally in speech without needing the same kind of support that a learner may expect from forms built with **ŋs-**.

This difference is subtle at first, but once it is felt, many other forms begin to make more sense. A learner no longer hears only a small vocabulary set built around the English word “good.” Instead, the learner begins to hear a family of forms that show how a good condition is situated in time. Is it simply holding right now? Is it established as a state? Is it being maintained? Is it continuing or changing? These are the kinds of differences that English often leaves vague, but Salish can bring forward clearly.

That is also why learners sometimes wonder why **čn ŋest** can mean “I am good” without **čnŋs**. The answer is that **ŋest** is already stative. It already names a settled condition. When **ŋs-** is added to a stative form, the meaning shifts. **čnŋs ŋest** is not just “I am good.” It is more like *I remain in a good state, I stay good, I keep well*. The state is being held or maintained in the present field.

From there, **ŋesty** opens the next step. If **ŋest** is a good state, then **ŋesty** is that good state continuing, changing, or unfolding. And **čnŋs ŋesty** brings that unfolding state into the present field: *I am continuing in a good state, I am in a good state that is actively holding or changing*. Seen this way, the forms are not interchangeable translations of “good.” They show different ways goodness can stand, remain, and keep unfolding through time.

This is one reason **ŋest** is such a helpful form for teaching. It is familiar enough to be recognized quickly, but deep enough to show learners that Salish is not just substituting one adjective for another. The form opens a doorway into aspect, state, and the language’s way of recognizing condition. Once that is heard, the learner can begin to feel why one form belongs in a greeting, another in a response about how one is doing, and another in describing a condition that continues or is being maintained.

The greetings are especially important because they are among the first phrases many people learn. They are often taught as simple greeting formulas, but they also recognize the condition of the time itself. In that sense, they do more than say hello. They say that the time stands in a good way. That is part of why these phrases matter so much. They are ordinary, but they quietly carry a deeper pattern of thought. The morning is not just being labeled



“good” from the outside. It is being recognized as standing in a good state. The same is true of the afternoon, or of a job well done. The language is not only judging; it is recognizing condition.

Salish	Useful feel / translation	What to notice
y čn <b>ǰes</b>	I am well. / I’m doing okay.	A current good condition is being framed as presently holding.
čn <b>ǰest</b>	I am good. / I am in a good state.	The form is stative. The goodness is presented as a settled state.
čnʃs <b>ǰest</b>	I remain in a good state. / I stay good.	The stative good condition is being maintained in the present field.
<b>ǰesty</b>	good state continuing / changing	The good state is in continuative or transforming motion.
čnʃs <b>ǰesty</b>	I am continuing in a good state.	The unfolding good state is actively holding in the present field.
<b>ǰest sk<sup>w</sup>ek<sup>w</sup>st</b>	It is a good morning. / Good morning.	The phrase recognizes the condition of the morning itself.
<b>ǰest snyf<sup>k</sup>qi</b>	It is a good afternoon. / Good afternoon.	The same family naturally extends into time-of-day recognition.
<b>ǰest ask<sup>w</sup>ul</b>	Good job. / That came together well.	The form recognizes successful fit and completion, not just praise.

This is why **ǰest** is such a powerful public form. It is simple enough to be familiar, but deep enough to carry the language’s way of recognizing condition. In greetings, it does not merely label the time with a positive adjective. It recognizes that the morning or afternoon stands in a good state, and that this condition can be noticed and named. In evaluation, it does not merely say “good” as praise. It recognizes that something has come together in a good way, that it stands well, fits well, or has settled into a good condition. And once learners begin to feel the contrast between **ǰes**, **ǰest**, **čnʃs ǰest**, and **ǰesty**, the whole family becomes easier to hear as a system rather than a list of translations, and easier to feel as different ways a good condition can be present through time.



## Place and action widen the worldview

Words like **ǰscnetk<sup>w</sup>**, “good bank/shore; beach,” widen the worldview further. A beach is not only named as an object or a scenery feature. It can be recognized through the condition of the shore itself — as fitting, usable, well-formed, and standing well in relation to the people who meet it. In that sense, the word does more than identify a place. It notices the quality of that place as a landing, an edge, a usable bank, a shore that works in the way a shore should. It points to a place that is good for arriving, good for standing, good for coming ashore, or good for being with. That is a very Salish kind of doorway, because it shows place understood through condition and relation rather than through flat object labeling alone. The place is not first reduced to a thing. It is recognized through how it stands and how it can be engaged.

**ǰsečstm** also helps. English might reduce it to “do something well,” but that is too flat. The word carries the sense of doing something softly, gently, carefully, or in a good manner. Here, goodness is not abstract praise and not just a judgment after the fact. It is a quality of handling, action, touch, and manner. It belongs to how the act is carried out. It can suggest care in the hands, care in the way one proceeds, or care in the way something is brought into completion. That matters, because it shows again that the **ǰs** family is not only about approval or saying that something turned out fine. It is also about the shape of the action itself — the way something is done, the care it carries, and the condition it creates as it unfolds.

Together, these words show that the **ǰs** family is not limited to feelings or greetings. It reaches into place, action, handling, and relation. It can name a shore through its good standing, and it can describe action through gentleness, care, and proper manner. That makes the vowels easier to trust, because the distinction does not stay trapped in theory or in a small set of memorized examples. It moves through the lived world. It shows up in how a place is recognized, how an act is carried, and how goodness can be felt as usability, care, and right relation rather than as a simple English adjective alone. In that way, the family begins to feel less like a vocabulary list and more like a way of recognizing how things stand, how they are handled, and how they come into relation well.

Form	Public sense	Worldview doorway
<b>ǰscnetk<sup>w</sup></b>	good bank/shore; beach	Place recognized through fitting and usable condition.
<b>ǰsečstm</b>	do something softly/gently; handle with care	Goodness carried through action, touch, and manner.



## Usable language across the family

One reason the wider family becomes easier to trust is that it stays usable. The same field that can hold **ǰes** and **ǰas** also supports everyday expressions about wellness, weather, taste, feeling, greetings, and successful work. That matters because it keeps the family from feeling like a special analysis reserved only for unusual examples. The forms do not live only in theory. They live in ordinary speech, ordinary interaction, and the small exchanges that make up daily life.

This is also why it helps to give replies, not only questions. A question on its own is useful, but a reply completes the exchange and teaches the learner what a natural answer sounds like. Often the answer is just as instructive as the question. It shows how the form stands in real use, how it returns, and how it carries the condition being asked about.

Salish	Useful feel / translation
<b>ha y k<sup>w</sup> ǰes</b>	Are you well?
<b>y čn ǰes</b>	I am well.
<b>ha ǰsaǰt</b>	Is it good weather?
<b>ǰ, ǰsasǰt</b>	Yes, it is good weather.
<b>ha ǰse</b>	Does it taste good?
<b>ǰ, ǰse</b>	Yes, it tastes good.
<b>ha k<sup>w</sup>ǰs nǰesls yǰ tǰ ǰ<sup>w</sup>a</b>	Are you feeling good today?
<b>ǰ, čnǰs nǰesls yǰ tǰ ǰ<sup>w</sup>a</b>	Yes, I am feeling good today.
<b>ǰest ask<sup>w</sup>ul</b>	Good job. / That came together well.
<b>lemlmtš</b>	Thank you.



If the reader only follows the English glosses, the family can look like a bundle of unrelated meanings. One form may seem to be about wellness, another about weather, another about taste, another about emotional state, and another about successful work. But if the reader stays with the **ǰs** field, the spread begins to feel more coherent: **fitting, workable, agreeable, well in condition, properly carried out, or standing out in a more marked way.**

That is the real value of the family. It does not force all the words into one narrow English definition. Instead, it helps the reader feel a shared orientation moving through different parts of life. Wellness is a good condition. Weather is a good condition. Taste is a good condition. A feeling can stand well. Work can come together well. The English words change, but the underlying field remains recognizable.

This is also where forms like **ǰsaǰt** become especially interesting. A learner may not yet know exactly what every ending is doing, but may begin to sense that the form is not random. After working through **ǰest**, the **-t** may start to feel familiar. It may begin to stand out as one of those recurring pieces that quietly helps present a condition as standing or state-like. The reader does not need to solve that fully yet. It is enough to notice that the language is beginning to repeat itself in meaningful ways.

This becomes even clearer in use. Someone asks **ha ǰsasǰt?**, *Is it good weather?* A natural reply is **ǰ, ǰsasǰt**, *Yes, it is good weather.* But if the same question is asked again later that day, the reply can shift to **ǰ, ǰs ǰsasǰt**, *Yes, it remains good weather.* Nothing else has to be added to explain that the condition is still holding. The language itself can show that the good-weather state is continuing in the present field.

That small contrast is especially helpful because it brings several things together at once. It shows **ǰsasǰt** as a state-like condition, and it shows what happens when **ǰs-** is added: not simply *it is*, but *it remains, it continues, it is still holding*. In that way, forms like **ǰsasǰt** quietly prepare the reader for a larger pattern. The **-t** may first be noticed here as part of a familiar everyday word, but once it begins to stand out, it can become one of the first clues that apparently fixed endings may still be speaking through smaller orientations across the system.

That kind of noticing matters. It is often the first step toward deeper structural understanding. What first looks like a collection of separate words begins to reveal a family. Then what first looks like a fixed ending begins to reveal an orientation. In that way, ordinary usable language becomes one of the best teachers. It lets the reader feel that the **ǰs** family is not only analytically coherent. It is alive across the lived world, and alive in the exchanges people actually use.



## A next question to carry forward

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By this point, a reader may naturally begin to ask new questions. If **ǰes** and **ǰest** are not just two different translations of “good,” then what exactly is **-t** doing? And if **-t** can be felt here as a state, could that same orientation be showing up in other words too?

That is an important question, and it is a good one to leave partly open. A learner may not yet know the suffix system well enough to answer it fully, but that does not mean the pattern cannot already be felt. In fact, this is often how deeper structure first becomes visible. A form stands out more than once. A small piece keeps carrying a similar force. The learner may not yet have the technical language for it, but the language itself begins to point.

One useful place to notice this is **ǰsasǰt**. Even without fully unpacking it yet, the ending **-t** can begin to feel familiar. It is not just sitting there as part of a frozen word. It may be doing something related to what we have already seen in **ǰest**: helping present a condition as standing, settled, or state-like. A reader may not be ready to analyze every piece yet, but that is all right. The important step is to begin noticing that forms often called “lexical suffixes” may still speak through their smaller orientations.

That is how this kind of discovery often begins. It does not begin with a finished theory. It begins when a recurring piece starts to stand out across multiple words. For me, **-t** was one of the first pieces that revealed itself clearly across the system. Once I stopped treating forms like **-asǰt** as unanalyzable chunks and allowed them to speak structurally, a larger pattern began to show itself. What looked fixed began to open. What looked lexical began to reveal orientation.

So the reader can carry a small mission forward from here: listen for **-t**. Notice where it appears. Ask whether it keeps bringing a similar sense of state, standing, or settled condition. That question does not need to be fully answered yet. In fact, it is better if it remains alive for a while. The important thing is that the learner has now reached the point where the language can begin answering it from within.

That is part of what this whole **ǰs** family has been helping make possible. It begins with a familiar public word like **ǰest**, but it does not end there. It starts to train the ear to hear condition, state, maintenance, unfolding, and eventually the smaller orientational pieces that keep returning across the system. Once that happens, even a familiar word is no longer only a vocabulary item. It becomes a doorway into how the language is built.



## Closing reflection

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If we stay only with English “good,” the family can feel too small. It can look like a handful of related words with only minor differences. But if we listen a little longer, forms like **ǰes** and **ǰas** begin to show that Salish can distinguish not only whether something is good, but how that goodness is felt — lived, present, settled, weighty, important, fitting, or standing out in a more marked way.

That is part of the worldview inside the family. The vowels do not just change the sound. They help shape how the condition is felt, recognized, and carried. A good condition can be current, state-like, maintained, unfolding, or more salient and consequential. Once that difference begins to come into view, the **ǰs** family becomes less like a set of English equivalents and more like a living field of relation.

And that shift matters. It means the reader is no longer only collecting translations. The reader is beginning to hear how the language organizes experience: how a condition stands, how it remains, how it changes, and how it can be recognized through relation. That is where the family begins to open beyond vocabulary and into structure.

## Continue the ǰs journey

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This document is the second public piece in the **ǰs** series. The earlier skunk document used **ǰsteyǰ** as a doorway into the broader feel of the family. This piece turns toward **ǰes** and **ǰas** to help readers hear how the vowels help shape different kinds of good, and how those differences move through wellness, weather, feeling, greetings, and everyday speech.

It also begins opening the next layer. Alongside the vowel contrasts, forms like **ǰest** and **ǰsasǰt** start to make recurring pieces such as **-t** noticeable in a new way. The goal here is not to solve the whole system at once, but to help the reader begin hearing where the language itself is pointing.

Coming next: a usage-focused piece on everyday forms and expressions from the **ǰs** family, bringing the wider pattern back into ordinary speech and continuing the path from familiar public language into deeper structural hearing.

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