VERB INFLECTION IN POLISH AND ENGLISH

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1.1. Inflection is differently understood by various scholars, so to compare the category in the two languages the author will adopt the following meaning: the role of inflection is to cumulate grammatical functions, e.g. in Polish robi-ł, "ł" indicates tense, person, number and gender. According to Heinz (1961) inflectional categories are regular and systematic sets, given apriori.

In English a verbal inflection has to cover one function, namely tense. Thus we can say that an English verb consists of two constituents: STEM+ TENSE AFFIX (cf. Stockwell 1965). A Polish one, however, consists of more constituents, namely: STEM+TENSE+ASPECT+PERSON+NUM- BER+(GENDER). These constituents are, to be more precise, functions to be expressed either inflectionally or by other means, e.g. prefix denoting aspect.

POLISH VERB INFLECTION

2.1. If we chose present tense we have following inflections:

	sg.	pl.
1.	-ę, -m	-my
2.	-sz	-cie
3.	-e, -i, -a	-ą

Their variety (in 3rd sg. for instance) depends on so-called conjugations which are, in turn, based on distinction of the theme vowel in 2nd sg., e.g. pisz-e-sz, myśl-i-sz, czyt-a-sz. Let us consider the functions performed by the endings:

ENDING	TENSE	PERSON	NUMBER
ę	present	1st	sg
sz	„	2nd	sg
e	„	3rd	sg
my	„	1st	pl
cie	„	2nd	pl
ą	„	3rd	pl

They do not express either gender or aspect. We cannot predict or define the aspect considering the ending only. If the aspect is perfective the verb with present tense ending (formally present) has the function of future perfective. There is no present perfective in Polish.

2.2. In the past tense Polish verb has the following inflectional endings:

	sg.			pl.	
	m.	fem.	n.	m.	non-m.
1.	-em	-am	(-om)	-iśmy	-yśmy
2.	-eś	-aś	(-oś)	-iście	-yście
3.	-Ø	-a	-o	-i	-y

Few remarks should be made here:

a. theoretically existing separate forms for neuter gender in past tense in 1st and 2nd sg are extremely rarely used and in literature only.

b. traditionally, in plural there are two genders only: masculine, taking -l- suffix in past tense and non-masculine taking -ł- as a past tense suffix.

c. the endings are added to so-called past tense theme (as opposed to present tense theme).

An inflectional verb ending of a verb in past tense then, expresses one more function, namely gender.

2.3. In future tense there are no inflectional verb endings employed, since it is formed by means of the future tense of the verb TO BE (być) and an infinitive or past participle of a given verb. As I have already indicated there may be functionally future perfective tense with formal characteristics (inflectional endings) of present.

2.4. A very important feature of Polish verbs has not been mentioned yet, there is consonant and vowel changes in different verb roots. Sometimes they may be considered part of inflection. The first consonants in the pairs given below occur in the theme of 1st sg and 3rd pl. (present tense) and the second in other persons:

a. CONSONANTAL CHANGE (qualitative)

b-b', p-p', m-m', w-w', f-f', d-dź, t-ć, s-ś, z-ź, n-ń, l-l, r-rz, g-dz, ż; k-c, cz, ch-sz, ś, h-ż, k, g-k, g'.

e.g. niosę — niesiesz, biorę — bierzesz, wlokę — wleczesz etc.

b. VOCALIC (qualitative)

e-o, e-a, o-ó, ę-ą,

e.g. niesiesz — niosę, jedziesz — jadę, niosła — niósł, wzięła — wziął.

ENGLISH VERB INFLECTION

3.1. The English verb system is complicated by the fact that the full verbs have inflected forms which are constructed in part by stem changes. "Regular verbs in English have their inflected forms which are constructed exclusively by the addition of suffixes to a single stem which is the base form". (Stockwell 1965: 124). In present tense, however, there is no difference as to regular and irregular verbs. Base form, unmarked by any suffix is used for all persons and both numbers in present tense, except for 3rd sg. This gender-marked form (used with pronouns marked for gender — he, she, it) consists of a stem plus -s ending. The inflection -s cumulates three functions: person, number and tense, whereas gender has to be marked by a pronoun. The base form itself with its zero inflection may serve as non-past form and it is only the pronoun that cumulates the functions of denoting person and number (not even always so, e.g. you).

3.2. In past tense the function of expressing tense is performed by -ed suffix, added to base form of regular verbs:

1 verb stem ending	2 phonemic shape 8f suffix	3 example
/-t, -d/ voiceless consonant others	/-id/ /-t/ /-d/	wanted cooked bathed

Past tense forms of irregular verbs are also marked inflectionally, although it is different inflection, namely modification of the stem of base form. The modifications may be of the following type:

a. VOWEL CHANGE ONLY:

lead   — led
shoot — shot

b. CONSONANT CHANGE ONLY:

> build — built
> make — made

c. VOWEL AND CONSONANT CHANGE:

> sell — sold
> bring — brought, etc.

3.3 The future tense is not marked inflectionally thus it will not be dealt with in my work.

3.4. Summing up the first part we should note the following:

  a. the category which is essential in Polish, namely the aspect, is not important in English, thus we have:

> English: Aux → t+mod
> Polish: Aux → mod+asp+t

  b. English verb-inflection expresses tense only, except -s which also marks the category of person and number.

  c. Polish verb-inflection expresses simultaneously: tense, person, number and in the past tense even gender.

  d. in either language the future tense is expressed inflectionally.

4.1. The verb TO BE is the one that has retained most of its inflectional forms and is to be treated separately. According to Stockwell (1965) there are the following forms of the verb in English:

1)	Base	BE
1a)	Non-past 1st sg	AM
1b)	Non-past pl and 2nd sg	ARE
2)	Gender marked	IS

3rd sg IS requires the subject with gender clearly stated and it is the reason for calling it gender marked. The above forms have their equivalents in Polish, namely:

Base	1)	BYĆ	(BE)
Non-past 1st sg	1a)	JESTEM	(AM)
NON-past 2nd sg	1b)	JESTEŚ	(ARE)
Gender marked	2)	JEST	(IS)

The forms that do not occur in English as separate entities are:

Non-past 1st pl	JESTEŚMY
Non-past 2nd pl	JESTEŚCIE
Non-past 3rd pl	SĄ

with suppletive stem.

4.2. Other forms given by Stockwell are:

3) a)	Past sg	WAS
b)	Past pl and 2nd sg	WERE
4)	Perfective participle	BEEN
5)	Imperfective participle	BEING

Polish forms roughly corresponding to them are:

3) a) BYŁ-EM, -AM — 1st sg
   BYŁ-EŚ, —AŚ — 2nd sg
   BYŁ-Ø, -A, -O — 3rd sg all corresponding

to English WAS.

   b) BYLIŚCIE, BYŁYŚCIE in plural, corresponding to English WERE

4) (BYŁY)

5) BĘDĄC, -Y, -A, -E.

4.3. There is no inflectional form of the verb in the future tense in English whereas it does exist in Polish. Inflectional endings of the present tense are added to imperfective participle stems, giving:

	sg	pl
1.	BĘDĘ	BĘDZIEMY
2.	BĘDZIESZ	BĘDZIECIE
3.	BĘDZIE	BĘDĄ

4.4. The most striking differences in both conjugations are:

a. inflectionally marked gender distinction in the Polish past tense: three in singular (masculine, feminine, neuter) and two in plural (masculine and non-masculine).

b. occurance of the inflectional future tense of the verb in Polish, whereas it does not exist in English. Having considered the distinctions and similarities we can say that the conjugations of the verb TO BE are the most similar ones in both languages although in case of English conjugation of the verb some functions are performed by pronouns, not only inflectionally. This verb may be of some significance in teaching either English or Polish more than any other verb, once having accounted for gender distinction. Also the variety of stems here resembles Polish one, making it thus more understandable to English students.

5.1. English participles, as other verbal forms, consist of two constituents: STEM + TENSE. If the tense is present the ending is -ING added to base form (see-ing, work-ing), whereas in the past tense we find -ED or -EN end-

ings with regular verbs or modification of the stem of the base form with irregular ones (according to the pattern described in 3.2). It must be stressed, however, that they never appear as MV alone. It is always the Aux symbol that accounts for the appropriate form of BE together with the present participle and HAVE with the past participle:

$$VP \rightarrow Aux+MV$$
$$Aux \rightarrow Tn \ (Modal) \ (have+en) \ (be+ing)$$

<div align="right">(Thomas 1965: 149)</div>

5.2. Polish contains a larger number of participles but I shall concentrate on those similar to English ones.

The first participle to be discussed is the present active participle (e.g. myjący). The endings are added to the present tense stem:

	sg		pl	
m	fem	n	m	non-m
-ĄCY	-ĄCA	-ĄCE	-ĄCY	-ĄCE

Similarly, as in English, it may function attributively or as a predicate with present or past tense of BYĆ which is not very frequent. The participle itself then, does not inform us as to the tense, person (even number, since -ĄCY and -ĄCE forms are homonymes) and aspect. There is, however, no active present participle in Polish which is perfective. Polish past participle is passive and may be formed from both the perfective and imperfective verbs. The following inflectional endings are added to the past tense stem:

	sg		pl	
m	fem	n	m	non-m
-TY	-TA	-TE	-CI	-TE

The participle may occur, as the previous one, either attributively or predicatively with present, past or future of BYĆ (to be) or future or past of ZOSTAĆ (become).

The above mentioned participles are not pure inflectional forms: most of the grammatical functions are performed here by the inflections of auxiliaries (in Polish) and auxiliaries plus pronouns in English.

6.1. Some conclusions arising from a comparison between the two systems become obvious:

(1) The only category marked inflectionally in both languages is tense (present and past).
(2) The category which is obligatory in Polish (unlike English) is aspect but not marked inflectionally.

(3) The categories of person, number or gender, existing in deep structures of both languages are expressed inflectionally only in Polish.
(4) The only inflectional ending expressing simultaneously: tense, person and number in English is -S, which may be of some help in explaining Polish inflection to English students.

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