

AN ANALYSIS OF NON-PROTOTYPICAL CONCORD IN POLISH AND ENGLISH¹

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ABSTRACT

The present paper discusses non-prototypical subject-verb concord in contemporary Polish and English. While in Polish inconsistencies chiefly occur in passive constructions and the use of verbal ellipsis, the problems in English concord appear to be related to the grammatical categories of number, notion the subject refers to as well as location of the noun in the subject position. In this paper I devote particular attention to such aspects of the Polish grammar as concord in negations and the relationship between number and concord. A comparative study of this aspect of grammar in the two languages demonstrates that where Polish concord is non-prototypical, English concord tends to be prototypical.

1. Introduction

This paper deals mainly with non-prototypical Polish and English subject-verb concord because generally, as I will argue in this paper, where English concord is non-prototypical, Polish concord is prototypical and vice versa. With regard to subject-verb concord in modern Polish, an unusual 'gender-biased' number system seems to be the primary 'determining element'. The number system is complex; there are, for example, twenty-three word 'permutations' for the number 'two' and the noun 'a/the two' (see Appendix One). Modern English only possesses two (*two/twos*); Campbell (1985: 283) presents 15 variants for the number 'two' used in Old English (see Appendix Two). The number 'two' in Old English was used in four cases and in three gender forms.

Inconsistencies in English appear to be related to the number (i.e. whether it is plural or singular), notion (i.e. what a compound noun subject refers to) or location

¹ I would like to thank Professor Witkoś for the kind comments he made during the preparation of this paper.

of a noun subject (i.e. principle of proximity). Yet in Polish whether or how the location of a noun affects verb agreement is not always clear. Polish is inconsistent and problematic in certain cases e.g. passive constructions of the type numeral + genitive noun + neuter singular verb + participle, cf. Saloni and Świdziński (1985: 253): *Cale tysiące żołnierzy zostało wziętych do niewoli* or *Cale tysiące żołnierzy zostały wzięte do niewoli* 'thousands of soldiers were captured'. What function does the third-person neuter singular verb fulfil in the following sentence: *dwie trzecie pracy zostało zrobione* 'two thirds of the work is done'? Why *zostało* and not *zostały*, which would agree with the numeral *dwie*? Does Polish have a principle of proximity/partial proximity (discussed later) or 'something else'? Does it use/accept the third-person singular neuter verb as a 'back-up/fail-safe option' when agreement is debatable (NB consider the function of the third person singular neuter verb *było* in *było mi zimno* 'I was cold')? Another issue in Polish pertains to whether Polish uses verbal ellipsis (with all its pragmatic 'repercussions') or a principle of proximity to avoid cumbersome multi-numeral sentences of the type *jest dwoje dzieci, są dwadzieścia dwa stoły i jest dwóch facetów* ('there are two children, twenty-two tables and two guys'). The way Polish notional concord works at times differs from English; this will also be discussed in this paper.

This paper was written with AMU² students in mind (i.e. I emphasise the things native speakers in both languages find difficult); it may also be a useful reference source for teachers of English in Poland.

2. The Polish number system

Rak (1992: 53) comments that ordinal numbers (e.g. *drugi* 'second', *piąty* 'fifth'), multiple numbers (e.g. *dwojaki* 'double/twofold', *pięcioraki* 'quintuple/fivefold'), and multiplicative numbers (e.g. *podwójny* 'double', *poczwórny* 'quadruple') all inflect according to number, gender and case. Most cardinal numbers (e.g. *dwa* 'two', *trzy* 'three') inflect according to case and gender. Collective-gender numbers (i.e. numbers which are mainly used to show that both male and female sexes are present, e.g. *jest dwoje ludzi* 'there are two [man+woman] people') are inflected only according to case. N.B. English has no equivalents of the Polish collective-gender numbers. Collective numbers are also used with: (1) nouns that represent young people or living things (e.g. *tu jest dwoje dzieci* 'there are two children here' or *tu jest dwoje kaczątek* 'there are two ducklings here'); (2) with nouns that have no singular forms (e.g. *tu jest dwoje nożyczek* 'there are two pairs of scissors here'). The numbers 'thousand', 'million', 'billion' and 'noun numbers' (e.g. *dwójka* 'the two', *trójka* 'the three') decline similarly to nouns. Fractional numbers (*półtora* 'one and a half', *półtrzecia* 'two and a half', *półczwarta* 'three and a half' [the last two num-

bers are archaic in Polish]) are not inflected. In Polish, ordinal numbers are inflected in the same way as adjectives. Polish has seven cases: the nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, instrumental, locative, and vocative.

Polish has two plural forms: one for women, children, animals and things; and the other for men, or for women, children, animals and things in the company of a man or men e.g. *one tu były* 'they were here' for women, children, animals, things or *oni tu byli* 'they were here' for men, or for women, children, animal, things in the company of a man or men. How this distinction came about or why it has been preserved is not clear, however it has fundamental significance in Polish grammar.

2.1. The number '5' is important in Polish concord

An unusual method of grouping numbers in Polish affects the way nouns and verbs agree, i.e. different number groupings trigger off different cases and verb forms. In Polish, the number 'five' appears to be important: If there are 1 to 4 women or (non-virile) things (NB non-collective gender 'things'), the verb is third-person plural, e.g. *są cztery kobiety* 'there are four women'; if there are 5 to 21 women or things the verb is third-person singular neuter, e.g. *było pięć kobiet* 'there were five women'. The pattern, discussed below in 'non-male subject-verb concordance' is 1-4, 5-21, 22-24, 25-31, 32-34, 35-41 etc. Collective-gender numbers take the verb in the third-person singular neuter, e.g. *było dwoje dzieci* 'there were two children'.

Evans (1992: 786) notes that a primitive method of counting was by the fingers. He further explains that in the Roman system of numeration 'i, ii, iii, iv' five was the outline of the hand simplified into a 'v'. This I believe may, to some extent, explain why the number five was so fundamental in Polish, i.e. a 'whole-hand' method of counting. The system of numeration, with corresponding noun case and verb agreement, is presented below.

2.2. Non-male (non-virile) subject-verb concordance

With regard to multiple digit numerals (above 21), the last digit determines the case: between 2-4 the noun case is nominative plural, and the verb takes the non-virile plural ending. Nouns for numbers between 5-21 take the genitive plural case, and the verb is third person singular neuter. The sequence below is discussed in Miodek (2002).

² AMU = Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland.

Table 1. Non-male (non-virile) subject-verb concordance

| Number series | Noun case | Example of concord with a literal English translation |
|---------------|---------------------|---|
| 1 | Nominative singular | <i>Jest jedna kobieta</i> 'there is one woman' |
| 2-4 | Nominative plural | <i>Są dwie kobiety</i> 'there are two women' |
| 5-21 | Genitive plural | <i>Jest pięć kobiet</i> 'there is five women' [verb is 3 rd person singular] |
| 22-24 | Nominative plural | <i>Są dwadzieścia dwie kobiety</i> 'there are twenty-two women' |
| 25-31 | Genitive plural | <i>Jest dwadzieścia pięć kobiet</i> 'there is 25 women' |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|-------|---|-------|---|-------|---|-------|---|-------|---|-------|------|--------|
| Noun Number | 22-24 | / | 25-31 | / | 32-34 | / | 35-41 | / | 42-44 | / | 45-51 | etc. | 95-101 |
| Verb | are | | is | | are | | is | | are | | is | | is |

2.3. Male (virile) subject-verb concordance

The above number series do not apply, as the noun case is always genitive plural, and the verb takes a third-person singular. (The 'male'-numbers *dwaj* 'two', *trzej* 'three', *czterej* 'four' are the only three exceptions in Polish, here the verb takes the third person virile plural e.g. *byli dwaj mężczyźni* 'there were two men'.)

było dwóch mężczyzn 'there were two men'
było pięciu mężczyzn 'there were five men'

2.4. Negations and large or small amounts

Certain words indicating amount, e.g. *dużo* 'a lot/many/much', *mało* 'a few/a little', *wystarczy* 'enough' always take a third-person neuter singular, e.g. *dużo ludzi to lubiło* 'a lot of/many people liked that'. The verb in negations of the type *nie ma* 'there isn't/aren't any', *nie było* 'there wasn't/weren't in Polish always appears in the (neuter) singular.

Ile 'how many/much' takes the noun in the genitive singular or plural depending on whether the noun is uncountable or countable, and the verb in the third person singular neuter e.g. *ile było arbuza?* 'how much melon was there?', *ile arbuzów było?* 'how many melons were there?'. It is interesting to note whether/how the position of the *było* affects the sentence pragmatics, e.g. which question would a Polish native speaker prefer and in what situation *ile było arbuzów?* or *ile arbuzów było??* Polish grammatical concord is based on the above system of numeration.

3. Polish concord is sometimes problematic?

Even though subject-verb concord in Polish is 'fairly' consistent (i.e. it on the whole follows the rules mentioned above), there are some problematic subject-verb situations. It is interesting to note that the 'concord equivalents' in English are straightforward for English native speakers. This might suggest that non-prototypical Polish concord is prototypical in English. All of the following sentences are considered correct by Doroszewski (1995). Consider which ones are prescriptive or descriptive? How would you justify your agreement (e.g. a principle of proximity, intuition, ellipsis)? Do you think some are incorrect? Why?

3.1. Doroszewski (1995: 295-300)

1. *Jest godzina siódma minut dwie.* 'It is two past seven.'
2. *Przebyliśmy dziś kilometrów trzy.* 'We've travelled three kilometres today.'

Even though the concord in examples 1 and 2 is not subject-verb, clearly the agreement is unusual. Why are the nouns *minuta* and *kilometr* in the genitive plural when the numerals are 'two' and 'three'?

3. *Ubyły (OR ubyło) cztery centymetry wody.* 'The water had gone down 4 cm.'
4. *Zostały (OR zostało) nam dwie godziny.* 'We had two minutes left.'

Doroszewski (1995: 295) states that if measurement units are used, the third-person singular neuter verb is acceptable; though they do not explain why Polish behaves in this way. The use of the third-person singular neuter verb would be correct in sentences of the type *ile wody ubyło* 'how much water had gone down' or *ile czasu zostało* 'how much time was left'. Are these sentences logical continuations of *ile* ('how much/many') questions or does Polish possess a 'back-up' option i.e. the third person singular neuter? NB Doroszewski (ibid.) maintains that *zostało zamknięte trzy szkoły* 'three schools were closed' is incorrect.

5. *Wysłane zostało pięć listów.* 'Five letters have been sent.'
6. *Pięć listów zostało już wysłanych.* 'Five letters have already been sent.'

7. *Ten tysiąc listów został już wysłany.* 'That batch of a thousand letters has already been sent.'
8. *Tych tysiąc listów zostało już wysłanych.* 'Those thousand letters have already been sent.'
9. *Te tysiąc listów zostało już wysłane.* 'That 'thousand' (i.e. letters) has already been sent.'
10. *Dobre jest tylko dziesięć samochodów.* 'Up to ten cars is ok.'
11. *Tysiąc żołnierzy walczyło na froncie.* 'A thousand soldiers fought on the front.'
12. *Zginął tysiąc żołnierzy.* 'A thousand soldiers died.'
13. *Tysiące żołnierzy zginęło (OR zginęły).* 'Thousands of soldiers died.'
14. *Miliard gwiazd znajduje się w tej części Galaktyki.* 'There are a billion stars in this part of the Galaxy.' [It is doubtful whether an English native speaker would say 'there is'.]

Doroszewski (1995) holds that sentences of the type *te tysiąc listów zostały już wysłane* or *całe tysiące żołnierzy zostało wzięte do niewoli* are incorrect.

Agreement in passive sentences of the type 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 15 is debatable. In sentences 5 and 10 (also 42 and 43), why do the *wysłane* 'sent' and *dobrze* 'good' not agree with the numerals *pięć* 'five' and *dziesięć* 'ten'? Is this a case of partial proximity, pragmatics or the 'back-up option'? Sentence 6 seems correct, but does the *zostało* agree with the *listów* i.e. proximity, or the *pięć*? Is it the numeral that determines the agreement or the genitive noun? Sentence 7 may be a good argument against a proximity principle, i.e. the verb *został* agrees with the noun furthest away, i.e. not with *listów* but with *ten tysiąc*. The translation 'that batch of a thousand' may explain why the verb is *został*.

Does the adjectival pronoun in sentence 8 (*tych*) agree with the numeral '1000' or the genitive noun *listów*? Does the verb *zostało* agree with the *listów* (i.e. proximity), the numeral (1000), or does it have some other function? Sentence 9 is particularly interesting: do the *te* and *wysłane* agree with a notion, i.e. *listy* (letters that are being sent in batches of a thousand)? Does the *zostało* agree with the *tysiąc* which is a numeral? How would a native speaker interpret and translate such a sentence? Is the translation accurate? Consider sentences 35 and 47 (i.e. *Te miliony*

ludzi zostały perfidnie oszukane or *Te tysiące oficerów zostały rozstrzelane*); here the verb appears to agree with the *te* or *miliony*.

In sentence 11 the verb may be agreeing with the soldiers (i.e. proximity) or the language might be using 'a' third person singular neuter back-up option. The verb in sentence 12 certainly does not agree with the plural genitive noun *żołnierzy*. Here the *tysiąc* appears to be a noun, i.e. 'a/the thousand'. In example 13 there are two options. Note that *zginęli* would be incorrect; and that Doroszewski (1995: 299) holds that *dwa tysiące żołnierzy zginęło* 'two thousand soldiers died' is correct. However, consider also sentences 34 and 46, i.e. *trzy tysiące kibiców czekały na...* or *dwa tysiące uczestników oczekiwały dopingu publiczności*: the verb seems to agree with 'a' numeral. The verb does not agree with a numeral in front of the noun *tysiąc* or the nominative plural noun *tysiące*; this seems inconsistent to say the least. Example 48 seems to contradict the previous example, i.e. *Trzy tysiące żołnierzy zginęło w czasie tego oblężenia*. Sentences of the type *Tysiące żołnierzy zostały zabite* 'thousands of soldiers were killed' or *Tysiące żołnierzy zostało zabitych* 'thousands of soldiers were killed' are also correct (according to Doroszewski *ibid*). A principle of 'partial proximity' (if it existed) could explain the concord in the first example, i.e. the verb *zostało* agrees with the genitive noun *żołnierzy*, and the past participle *zabite* agrees with plural nominative noun *tysiące*. There are clearly significant inconsistencies to the way *tysiąc* concurs with a verb in Polish.

15. *Milion ton (węgla) został wydobyty.* 'A million tonnes (of coal) was excavated.'
16. *Miliony bakterii znajduje (OR znajdują) się w wodzie.* 'There are millions of bacteria in the water.'

In example sentences 14 and 15 (also see 33), the verbs appear to be agreeing with the numerals (if these are in fact numerals and not nouns). Sentence 14 is ambiguous (i.e. the verb may actually be agreeing with the genitive plural noun). Example 16 has two variants (it would be interesting to find out which variant native speakers 'intuitively' prefer and then ask them why they prefer the particular case).

17. *Minęło sto dni.* '100 days passed.'
18. *Minęły sto dwa dni.* '102 days passed.'
19. *Oboje rodzice wyrazili zgodę.* 'Both parents gave permission.'
[But note *oboje podróżnych*.] ['Both travellers.']

20. *Dwoje źrebiąt jest uwiązane u plotu.* OR *Dwoje źrebiąt jest uwiązanych u plotu.* 'Two foals are tied to the gate.'
21. *Trzy piąte sumy przypada (OR przypadają) wygrywającemu.* '3/5 of the sum goes to the winner.'
22. *Dwie dziesiąte metra wody ubyło (OR ubyły).* 'It went down 2/10 of a metre of water.'
23. *Trzy i pół roku (było?)...* 'Three and a half years were'...
24. *Pięć i pół godziny (było?)...* 'Five and a half hours were'...
25. *Wiele rzeczy zostało zrobione (OR zrobionych).* 'A lot of things were done.'

In sentences 17 and 18 the verb comes before the numeral (the agreement is prototypical), yet a speaker of Polish would have to know what the numeral is, before he/she chooses a verb (NB psycholinguistic research may help explain how such processes work). In sentence 19 the use of *oboje* 'both' may be (?) inconsistent. Should it not have similarities with the way multiple gender numbers work, e.g. *dwoje* 'two'. In example 20 (also see 25), the second sentence seems more prototypical, yet strangely *uwiązane* is also possible (maybe it agrees with the plural noun *źrebięta* 'foal', which of course does not appear in the sentence as such). Sentences 21 and 22 are grammatically similar (also see 37); the third person plural verb form appears to be agreeing with the initial numeral. Would the use of third-person singular neuter verb in sentences 23 and 24 at the beginning of sentences, i.e. *było* or *były* (?) *trzy i pół roku* 'three and a half years' suggest Polish does not use a principle of proximity and that *było* serves some other grammatical function?

3.2. Saloni and Świdziński (1985: 189-283)

26. *Widzę pięciu chłopców i pięć dziewczyn.* 'I see 5 boys and girls.'
27. *pięcioro państwa* 'a (mixed) group of five Mr and Mrs.'
28. *Część ludzi została (OR zostało) na przystanku.* 'Some people were left at the bus stop.'
29. *Widzę pozostałe siedem kart.* 'I can see the remaining 7 cards.'

Example 26: Would most Polish native speakers use two separate numerals, or would one of them be elided? Saloni and Świdziński (1985: 178-180) present example 27, i.e. a multiple gender number used with a plural noun; would the verb be third-person plural or neuter singular, i.e. *byli* or *było*? The *pozostałe* in sentence 29 seems to agree with *karty* even though this word does not appear in the sentence in that form.

3.3. Markowski (2002: 1672-1687)

30. *Trzy ekspedientki były krańcowo wyczerpanych.* 'Three shop assistants were extremely tired.'
31. *Cztery biegaczki czekały na sygnał startera.* 'Four runners waited for the starter's signal.'
32. *Zamieszkał tu tysiąc emigrantów.* '1000 emigrants settled here.'
33. *Milion ton pszenicy został przeznaczony...* 'One million tonnes of wheat were set aside...'
34. *Trzy tysiące kibiców czekały na...* 'Three thousand supporters waited for...'
35. *Te miliony ludzi zostały perfidnie oszukane.* 'Those millions of people were cheated terribly.'
36. *Zostało mi jeszcze trzy czwarte deseru.* 'Three quarters of the dessert was left for me.'
37. *Trzy czwarte maturzystów wybrało (OR wybrały) pierwszy temat.* 'Three quarters of secondary-school pupils chose the first topic.'
38. *Ci troje pierwsi wpadli na ten pomysł.* 'Those three were the first to have that idea.'
39. *Szereg osób nie umiało się dostosować.* 'Many people did not know how to adapt to the situation.'
40. *Pierwszy szereg żołnierzy zajął miejsca.* 'The first line of soldiers took their seats.'

Sentences 30 and 41 seem almost 'unbelievable', yet two authoritative sources claim that they are acceptable (i.e. not serious errors). Sentence 32 is similar to sentence

12. What function does the *zostało* serve in sentence 36 (certainly not proximity)? In example 38 the multiple gender numeral should take a noun in the genitive case (i.e. *troje pierwszych wpadło* 'the first three came...'), yet the agreement is inconsistent. Also consider 49 (i.e. *nas troje postanowiło uczyć się* 'we three people decided to study'), here the agreement seems more prototypical. A change in semantics affects concord as would suggest examples 39 and 40.

3.4. Jadacka (1995: 416-422)

- | | | |
|-----|--|---|
| 41. | <i>Cztery zawodniczek było w optymistycznym nastroju</i> [claimed to be acceptable]. | '4 female competitors were feeling optimistic.' |
| 42. | <i>Poprawne było tylko osiem odpowiedzi.</i> | 'Only 8 responses were correct.' |
| 43. | <i>Wygodne było jedynie osiem nowych mieszkań.</i> | 'Only 8 new flats were comfortable.' |
| 44. | <i>Moje pięć córek zostało wysłane na kolonie.</i> | 'My 5 daughters were sent to a summer camp.' |
| 45. | <i>Moich pięć córek zostało wysłanych na kolonie.</i> | 'My 5 daughters were sent to a summer camp.' |
| 46. | <i>Dwa tysiące uczestników oczekiwały dopingu publiczności.</i> | 'Two thousand participants expected to be cheered.' |
| 47. | <i>Te tysiące oficerów zostały rozstrzelane.</i> | 'Those thousands of officers were shot.' |
| 48. | <i>Trzy tysiące żołnierzy zginęło w czasie tego oblężenia.</i> | 'Three thousand soldiers died during the siege.' |
| 49. | <i>Nas troje postanowiło uczyć się.</i> | 'The three of us decided to study.' |

Do sentences 44 and 45 suggest that pronouns and participles have optional concord forms?

4. Concord in English

Quirk et al. (1986: 360) mention that difficulties over concord tend to arise when there is some 'conflict' between grammatical concord (i.e. when the verb matches the subject in number) and two other 'tendencies or principles', i.e. the principle of notional concord and the principle of proximity. Quirk et al. (1986: 360) define notional concord as "agreement of the verb according to idea of number rather than actual presence of the grammatical marker". The principle of proximity denotes agreement of verb "with whatever noun or pronoun closely precedes it"; many grammarians consider proximity concord to be informal or even ungrammatical. Most of the debatable subject/verb cases below refer to notional and proximity concord.

4.1. Debatable subject-verb agreement

How should the number of the verb be decided if the subject and complement are of different numbers?

- Clouds are vaporised water* (not *is*)
- The last crop was potatoes* (*were* would be informal)
- The wages of sin is death* (not *were*)
- Its strongest point is the diagrams* (*are* would be informal)

Fowler (1981: 401) states that when the subject is a straightforward singular (not a noun of multitude), or a straightforward plural (not used in a singular sense, like *wages* 'guerdon') and does not consist of separate items (as in *he and she*), the verb follows the number of the subject wherever the complement may be. In Polish the verb would be third person plural, there would be no informal alternative.

If the subject is compound, as with *father and children were killed*, the compound subject must be plural, regardless of whether its components are plural, of different number, or both singular; it follows that the verb is plural. Quirk et al. (1986: 361) call this non-appositional coordination, i.e. an implied reduction of two clauses. The verb in this sentence in Polish would clearly be in the third-person plural. If numbers are specified in compound noun-subject sentences, Polish concord rules would create cumbersome (or less economical) sentences of the following type: *dwaj ojcowie zostali zabici i czworo dzieci zostało zabitych*, i.e. the verb would have to agree with each noun subject. It is interesting to note that many Polish native speakers would prefer to use one verb, i.e. *dwaj ojcowie i czworo dzieci zostało zabitych*. Does this suggest that Polish uses an 'informal' principle of proximity – NB *zostało* does not agree with *dwaj* – verbal ellipsis, or 'a back-up' option? Checking the reverse may be helpful with regard to whether Polish uses a principle of proximity i.e. *czworo dzieci i dwaj ojcowie zostali zabici* (?). Which would a Polish native speaker prefer?

Their lives, their liberties, and their religion is (OR are) in danger.

Some would justify *is*, using the principle of proximity, yet Fowler (1981: 401), with regard to the above, writes that *is* is a wrong singular, and states that the use of *is* “seems to point to a mistaken theory that, when the parts of a compound subject differ in number, the verb follows the nearest”. Fowler, however, adds that true grammar may sometimes be ‘overridden’ if there is a better justification other than ‘carelessness’ and ‘ignorance’. For instance, if the group forms a compound word – a single notion, as with *bread and butter*, a singular verb is natural (i.e. notional concord); the same is so in Polish. In the above sentence, in Polish, the verb would be in the third-person plural as all the ‘things’ in the compound subject are non-virile nouns. NB a sentence of the type *There are six men, twenty-two chairs and three children* – *Jest sześciu mężczyzn, są dwadzieścia dwa krzesła i jest troje dzieci* adheres to the rules discussed earlier. The sentence in Polish, however, seems stilted and more ‘clumsy’ than its English counterpart. Many Polish native speakers may intuitively use (1) an informal principle of proximity e.g. *jest sześciu mężczyzn, dwadzieścia dwa krzesła i troje dzieci*; (2) verbal ellipsis; (3) a third-person singular back-up option.

The traditional feeling that killing and violence was against the moral law.

Fowler (1981: 401) argues that *killing and violence* amount to a hendiadys meaning ‘violent killing’. Hill (1993: 167) defines a hendiadys as the use of two nouns joined by *and* instead of a noun and an adjective. Fowler (1981: 245) notes that *nice and warm, grace and favour, rough and ready* may be used instead of *nicely warm, gracious favour* or *roughly ready*; here, a verb would be in the singular. Quirk et al. (1986: 362) define such cases as appositional coordination, because the subject elements refer to the same thing. In Polish the verb in such a sentence would probably be third-person singular, because ‘killing and violence’ would also represent one idea, though some may argue that the notion ‘killing and violence’ is plural, i.e. *zabijanie i przemoc są*.

‘Siamese twins’, a term used by Fowler (1981: 554) to describe words linked in pairs by *and* or *by*, convey a single meaning; this means that the verb is singular. With the following examples the combination has a different meaning from that of its components: *chopping and changing, part and parcel, use and wont, might and main*; others consist not only of synonyms but of associated ideas – *bill and coo, bow and scrape, flotsam and jetsam, hum and ha, ways and means*; some combinations consist of opposites or alternatives – *cut and thrust*; some are from law – *act and deed, aid and abet, let or hindrance*; some may be literary allusions – *rhyme or reason, fear and trembling, sackcloth and ashes, whips and scorpions*. Such phrases are non-prototypical and language-specific. Polish also has ‘Siamese twins’ (though fewer than English), of which an example is presented below. It is interesting to note that the English translation takes the verb in the third person plural, which may suggest that translating Siamese twins is problematic:

Gość i ryba na trzeci dzień cuchnie. ‘Fish and guests smell at three days old.’

Alternative pairs of the type *mother or children are (NOT is) to die* are awkward (i.e. the principle of proximity is used); the strategy for such constructions should be one of avoidance. Fowler (1981: 402) advises: (1) using verbs of common number (*mother or children must die*); (2) invoking ellipsis by changing the order (*the mother is to die, or the children*); (3) by giving the verb the number of the nearest alternative (*mother or children are to die/children or mother is to die*). This kind of concord is logic-specific rather than language-specific.

Sentences of the type: singular subject + of + plural noun + verb tend to cause problems in English, e.g. *the results of the recognition of truth are NOT is*. In Polish ‘results’ is a non-virile plural noun: the verb would be in the third-person plural.

Fowler (1981: 402) points out that sentences of type *He is one of the best men that have ever lived (NOT has)* are particularly troublesome as relative pronouns can in themselves be singular or plural. In such a sentence there are two words which could serve as antecedent to *that*, i.e. *one* and *men*. Rewriting this sentence as *Of the best men that have ever lived, he is one* shows just how wrong *has* would be. In Polish the verb would agree with the virile noun ‘men’ – it would be in the third-person plural, i.e. *jacy kiedykolwiek żyli*.

Nouns of multitude, e.g. *army, fleet, Government, company, party, pack, crowd, club, choir, cast, number* etc. can be treated as singular or plural in English. Polish does possess plural nouns that look like singular nouns (e.g. *generalostwo* ‘general and his wife’, *państwo* ‘Mr and Mrs’, *wujostwo* ‘aunt and uncle’) or singular nouns that you would expect to be plural (e.g. *magnateria* ‘nobility’, *pospólstwo* ‘commonality’, *młodzież* ‘youth’). If the noun in English has a plural sense, the verb and any pronouns should be in the plural e.g. *The company are at work now and ready to do their (NOT its) bit*. The choice of verb may affect the overall meaning e.g. *The staff was huge* (meaning there were a lot of staff) vs. *The staff were huge* (meaning they were very large people). Davidson (1996: 72) shows that choice of relative pronoun, like singular and plural verb, depends on whether the noun is looked upon as denoting a single body (in which case *which* is used), or a number of individuals (in which case *who* is used): *The committee which meets every day; The committee who meet every day*. Quirk et al. (1986: 360-361) point out that in British English collective nouns that are notionally plural obey notional concord, i.e. the verb is plural. In American English, the collective noun nearly always takes a singular verb.

Alexander (1988: 46) with regard to collective nouns that do not have plural forms (i.e. *the aristocracy, the gentry, the proletariat, the public, the youth of today*) notes that they can be followed by a singular or plural verb; in Polish there would be no alternative i.e. the number of the noun determines the verb case.

Her offspring is (or are) like her in every respect.

The youth of today is (or are) better off.

Alexander explains that some collective nouns take a plural verb, i.e. *cattle, the clergy, the military, people, the police, vermin*. Fowler (1981: 677) however notes that *vermin* is usually treated as a plural, but sometimes as singular (*this vermin*, i.e. *these rascals*) and occasionally it has both *a* in the collective sense, i.e. *a vermin that I hope to reduce the numbers of* and as denoting an individual (*such a vermin as you*).

The police/military have surrounded the building.

With the exception of *people* and *vermin*, which are plural nouns in Polish and so take the verb in the third-person plural, all the above words are singular in Polish. Some English nouns have a plural form though take a singular verb, i.e. *news, darts, Athens*.

The news is really bad.

Polish appears to be more consistent with regard to the following sentences: *liczba czegoś...* i.e. the verb always agrees with the noun *liczba* 'number' (*liczba czegoś jest/była duża*). Compare the English sentences *The number of people present was large* (the verb is singular because *number* has a definite article); *A number of people were present* (the verb is plural because the noun *number* has an indefinite article); and *a number of details have been settled* (here *a number of details* is a composite subject equivalent to numerous details).

There were a table and some chairs is problematic – *were* is preferable to *was* because the compound subject is compact. But in *There was a big round French table which had long wooden legs and some chairs* – *was* is better as the compound subject is not compact, and a relative clause has been attached to one of its components. This kind of sentence is logic-specific and not language-specific. The Polish translation of the first sentence may sound stilted to some Polish native speakers, i.e. *Był stół i było parę krzesel*, while the sentence *Był stół i parę krzesel* is correct to most Polish native speakers; a 'principle of proximity' or ellipsis may explain why. An interesting question might be how ellipsis or a principle of proximity works, and in what situations.

English sentences containing *he or her, himself or herself* have three legitimate permutations, while Polish only has one (*się/siebie*, which decline, i.e. *Jan wierzy w siebie* 'Jan believes in himself', *Jan opowiada o sobie* 'Jan talks about himself', *Jan interesuje się tylko sobą* 'Jan is interested only in himself'). English *anyone can see for himself or herself* is rather pedantic or clumsy; however, *anyone can see for themselves* is regarded as informal by some grammarians. Fowler recommends *anyone can see for himself* if the matter of sex is not important, and the male case is statutory in the interpretation of documents. This is an example of subject-object concord.

Maciver (1986: 81) is quite traditional/formal with regard to concord. English however seems, at least colloquially, to have informal variants of the sentences below; Polish has no variants.

The informal versions are examples of the principle of proximity.

Each of the boys has a toy (informally, *has* is sometimes replaced by *have*).

One of the ladies is married (informally, *is* is sometimes replaced by *are*).

Neither of the ladies is married (informally, *is* is sometimes replaced by *are*).

None of the ladies is married (informally, *is* is sometimes replaced by *are*).

Maciver (1986: 81) notes that a singular subject with attached phrases introduced by *with, like* or *as well as* is followed by a singular verb. This kind of grammatical situation is logic-specific.

The boy, with several others, was late.

Alice, like Rose, is tall for her age.

Tom, as well as Fred, rises early in the morning.

Sinclair (1995: 568) defines *everyone/everybody* as 'all the people'. The Polish equivalent takes a plural verb, yet in English, the verb is singular. Polish learners are very often confused by such strange agreement: After all, 'all the people' implies 'they' and so a plural verb; the sentence *All of them are crazy* does not really help when trying to explain the concord logic for *everyone/everybody*.

The plural nouns *heaps* and *lots* used informally for 'great amounts', as Fowler (1981: 403) shows, take a singular verb unless a plural noun with *of* is added, i.e. *there is heaps of ammunition; there are heaps of cups; there is lots to do; lots of people think*. Some Polish students may find such sentences confusing – Polish does not have such informal alternatives.

Alexander (1988: 46-47) claims that some nouns with a plural form take a singular or plural verb, though there seems to be some dispute between grammarians on certain aspects of his argument. Alexander argues that the following nouns ending in *-ics* take a singular verb: *athletics, gymnastics, linguistics, mathematics* and *physics*, e.g. *Mathematics is a difficult subject*. Thomson and Martinet (1991: 27) state that "a number of words ending in *-ics, acoustics, athletics, ethics, hysterics, mathematics, physics, politics* etc., which are plural in form, normally take a plural verb: *His mathematics are weak*". Davidson (1996: 94-95) argues that when nouns ending in *-ics* denote subjects of study, academic disciplines or fields of activity, they are singular e.g. *Politics is perhaps the only profession for which no preparation is thought necessary*. If, however, such words denote data, ideas, actions etc, they are treated as plural nouns, e.g. *Their politics at that time were more left-wing than they are now*. Fowler (1968: 260) comments that the plural form is used "for a manifestation of qualities, often recognisable by the presence of 'his' or 'her' etc.". He further notes that plural forms are used for denoting 'behaviour

or the like', e.g. *Hysterics leave me cold; Heroics are out of fashion*. All English *-ics* words are singular in Polish.

Davidson (1996: 94) states that names of diseases which end in *-s* (e.g. *measles, mumps, rabies, shingles*) are treated as singular nouns, yet Alexander (1988: 47) argues that a plural verb is sometimes possible: *Mumps are (OR is) fairly rare in adults*. In Polish if a noun is a plural noun, e.g. *plecy* 'back', *urodziny* 'birthday', *ludzie* 'people', it always is a plural noun. Some plural nouns in Polish are singular in English (e.g. *Chiny są* 'China is' or *Indie są* 'India is', *usta* 'mouth', *plecy* 'back', *urodziny* 'birthday') and vice versa (e.g. *the police are – policja jest* or *the arms are – broń jest*, *binoculars – lornetka*, *tweezers – pinceta*, *scales – waga*, *clothes – ubranie*); and finally, some plural nouns in Polish are plural in English, e.g. *spodnie – trousers*, *okulary – glasses*, *rajstopy – tights*.

Nouns with the same singular and plural forms are often confusing for Polish learners e.g. *bison, cattle, sheep, swine, fruit, fish, aircraft, species, series, cross-roads*, e.g. *The fish is/are big*. Gove (1986: 26a) notes that certain nouns denoting fishes, birds, and mammals have both a plural with a suffix and a singular zero plural that is identical with the singular. The following form a plural with a suffix (except occasionally when modified by an adjective like *wild, native, sea, mountain*): *bird(s), cow(s), crow(s), dog(s), monkey(s), parrot(s)* etc. Sentences of the type *Mountain/native/sea/wild bird are beautiful* are problematic. Those who hunt or fish tend to use a zero plural form: *The partridge/rabbit/stag here (I hunt) are plentiful*. Another awkward situation in English is with the group of nouns of which the zero plural is commoner, but the plural with a suffix is used to signify diversity in kind or species, e.g. *the trouts/mackerels/fishes of the Rocky Mountains are very different – but two trout/mackerel/fish are enough*. In Polish it is, as mentioned earlier, the number that determines the verb form, i.e. non-virile/virile things follow the number series mentioned earlier, collective-gender numbers take the verb in the third-person neuter singular.

The singular form *there's (OR there was)* is often used informally in place of *there are* to refer to the plural, e.g. *There's lots of cars on the roads; There's a man and a dog in our garden*. Such informalities do not apply to Polish.

When talking about an amount of money, time, or a distance, speed or weight, you usually use a number, a plural noun and a singular verb: sentences of this type often confuse Polish learners, though sentences of the type *300 funtów wystarczyło* 'three hundred pounds was enough' do not (i.e. the verb is in the third person singular neuter).

Three hundred pounds is enough.

Ten years is a long time.

Three miles is too far.

90 miles an hour is too fast.

Ninety kilos is all she weighs.

Most place names in English are singular, though some groups of islands or mountain ranges are plural nouns. Weiner and Hawkins (1985: 176) comment that the Bahamas and the Philippines are treated as singular when considered as a unit, and can be treated as plurals when referring to geographical names of the groups of islands which the two nations comprise.

The Bahamas were settled by British subjects.

The Bahamas is mainly an agricultural country.

When one talks about fractions/percentages of a single thing, a singular verb form is used in English Polish also uses a singular verb as all fractions/percentages take the genitive case, i.e. the verb is in the third-person singular.

Two thirds of the work was done. (Would this be *zostało zrobione* or *zostały zrobione*?)

90 percent of the work is done.

When the fraction or percentage refers to a number of things, the verb is plural; in Polish the verb is singular though the following appear correct: *dwie trzecie są biedne, jedna trzecia jest biedna, większość ludzi jest biedna*. Many Polish native speakers feel *dwie trzecie ludzi było biednych* is correct. The latter example would suggest that (1) a principle of proximity operates in Polish; (2) the third person neuter singular has some other function (as discussed earlier).

Two thirds of people were poor.

(In the above sentence, Polish native speakers have difficulty deciding whether *było*, *były*, or even *byli* should be used).

90 percent of people are poor.

Sinclair (1990: 379) comments that in English singular verbs are used with uncountable nouns preceded by *all* or singular count nouns preceded by *each* and *every*. Polish takes a plural verb in both cases as it agrees with the virile or non-virile subject nouns.

All his effort and sacrifice is proof....

Every man, woman and child who was present was...

Polish would use plural verbs in the translations of the above: *Cały jego wysiłek i poświęcenie są dowodem... Każdy mężczyzna, kobieta i dziecko, którzy byli obecni, byli...*

A number of words can be treated as exceptions to the general rule of noun-verb agreement (i.e. verbs must agree with the person and number of their subject). Consider:

(1) *rest*

The rest of them were ill – ‘rest’ is singular in Polish.

(2) *average, majority, maximum, minimum, minority* and *total*.

A total of five books is/are available.

Davidson (1996: 67-68) points out that most of these words are followed by a plural verb if they refer to a number of items or individuals. He further confuses the issue by saying “it is not incorrect to use a singular verb”. All the above words are singular in Polish.

The verb agreement for additions, as Swan (1997: 388) shows, can be plural or singular; Polish is singular. Quirk et al. (1986: 362) mention that arithmetic sums “illustrate non-appositional coordination with the possibility of a singular verb”.

$2+2=4$ *Two and two is/are four*

Quirk et al. (1986: 364) argue that *neither/nor* behave in colloquial speech more like *and* than like *or* as regards concord (this can be viewed as notional concord). Note the Polish *chłopiec ani dziewczyna nie czytają książek* (‘neither the boy nor the girl reads books’) differs from formal English concord.

Neither he nor his wife are here (informal-notional).

Both he and his wife are not here (similar meaning).

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have drawn attention to concord inconsistencies in both Polish and English. On the whole non-prototypical Polish concord is prototypical in English and vice versa. Whether or not Polish possesses a (partial) principle of proximity, ellipsis, a third-person neuter singular verb ‘back-up’, or an informal option is not clear. Notional concord in Polish does not always work the same way as notional English concord.

Concord in English can be extremely confusing for learners and native speakers alike. Many of the debatable situations in English refer to notional concord or proximity concord. In colloquial speech, English sometimes has an informal alternative of the formal subject-verb agreement. In certain cases there is some difference of opinion between grammarians; this is not particularly helpful for learners. Teachers should be wary when teaching English concord: students may become ‘frustrated’ if the teacher is unable to give a perspicuous explanation of a particular grammatical situation.

It would be interesting to research how concord in Old English was used and what effect the simplified English number system has on concord in modern English. Such research may throw some light on what would happen to Polish subject-verb concord if the number system were to be simplified/revised.

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APPENDIX ONE

Table 2. Declension patterns of the cardinal number *dwa* 'two'. Based on Rak (1992: 54)

| Declension Form | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| | Male forms | Non-male and neuter forms | Feminine forms |
| Nominative | <i>dwaj / dwóch</i> | <i>dwa</i> | <i>dwie</i> |
| Accusative | <i>dwóch / dwu</i> | <i>dwa</i> | <i>dwie</i> |
| Genitive | <i>dwóch / dwu</i> in all genders | | |
| Dative | <i>dwóm / dwóm</i> in all genders | | |
| Instrumental | <i>dwoma</i> in two genders | | <i>dwoma</i> |
| Locative | <i>dwóch / dwu</i> in all genders | | |
| Vocative | N/A | | |

Table 3. Declension pattern of collective-gender numbers: *dwoje ludzi* 'two people' [a man and a woman]

| Case | One plural form only |
|--------------|----------------------|
| Nominative | <i>dwoje</i> |
| Accusative | <i>dwoje</i> |
| Genitive | <i>dwojga</i> |
| Dative | <i>dwojgu</i> |
| Instrumental | <i>dwojgiem</i> |
| Locative | <i>dwojgu</i> |

Table 4. Declension patterns of the feminine Polish noun *dwójka* 'the/a two'. Based on Wróbel et al. (1993: 17)

| Case | Singular | Non-masculine plural |
|--------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Nominative | <i>dwójka</i> | <i>dwójki</i> |
| Accusative | <i>dwójkę</i> | <i>dwójki</i> |
| Genitive | <i>dwójki</i> | <i>dwójek</i> |
| Dative | <i>dwójce</i> | <i>dwójkom</i> |
| Instrumental | <i>dwójką</i> | <i>dwójkami</i> |
| Locative | <i>dwójce</i> | <i>dwójkach</i> |
| Vocative | <i>dwójko</i> | <i>dwójki</i> |

23 word variants for the number and noun 'two'

dwa, dwie, dwaj, dwu, dwóch, dwóm, dwóm, dwiema, dwoma, dwoje, dwojga, dwojgu, dwojgiem, dwójka, dwójkę, dwójki, dwójce, dwójką, dwójko, dwójek, dwójkom, dwójkami, dwójkach

APPENDIX TWO

Campbell (1985: 283): Old English Word variants

twē, twä, tū, twēg(e)a, twēg(e)ra, twm, twæga, twēge(n), twægen, tuū, twū, tuēm, (twain)