

# Polish Present Tense Copula

Anna Kupść

Strikingly, forms of the present tense *być* ‘be’ resemble more past tense rather than Polish present tense conjugation system. In 1st and 2nd persons, the present tense verb takes endings characteristic of the past tense, compare (1) and (2). Then, similarly to the past tense, and in contrast to other present tense verbs in Polish, copula endings do not have to be fixed to the verb and in singular they can appear somewhere to its left (3b). As discussed in Bański (2000), Kupść and Tseng (2005), there is evidence that the past tense endings, despite their mobility, can be treated as affixes. Properties of the present tense forms of *być* point even stronger into this direction: an epenthetic vowel *e* is inserted after *jest*-stems in singular and plural (a consonant-final verbal host, (1), (3a)), penultimate stress (indicated by capital letters) is obligatory with plural copula forms, i.e., *jesTEśmy* vs. \**JEsteśmy* ‘we are’, while it is optional / dialectal with past tense plural verbs, and specific morphophonological restrictions on non-verbal hosts (e.g., attachment to vowel-final words) hold for the endings in the present tense as well. These similarities are historically motivated as present tense and past tense markings originated from the same weak forms of BE in Old Polish. Morphologically, however, modern forms of the present tense copula are not a past tense built on the *jest* stem, cf. Andersen (1987). In the rest of the paper, we discuss syntactic properties of the present tense forms.

As mentioned above, in the present tense, only the singular endings can be separated from *jest*, (3b) vs. (4a). In plural, if the ending is not attached to a verbal host, marginally the plural form *sq* can appear instead, (4a), but the construction sounds archaic. In contrast to the past tense, the 1st and 2nd person endings may appear on their own, both in singular and in plural, (4b–c). Note that the verbless singular constructions are possible across a subordinate conjunction (5a), the behaviour which should be contrasted with verb ellipsis (gapping) in (5b). In plural, the presence of stand-alone markings cannot be due to a syntactic deletion, as the “intermediate” construction (4a) is only marginally possible. Note that the archaic form is not morphologically related to the full form either as it contains the plural *sq* rather than the

singular *jest* which appears in the full form.

These disfluencies suggest that copula constructions do not present a uniform phenomenon. This observation is supported by distinct properties they have with respect to extraction and negation. Although extraction out of indicative clauses in Polish is quite restricted in general, there is a clear difference in grammaticality between verbal, (6a–b), and verbless, (6c), constructions: only the former allow for complement extraction. As for negation, sentential negation can result only if the copula is present, (7a–b). If the marking appears on its own, only the predicate rather than the entire sentence is negated and a contrasting meaning often results, see (7c).

We propose an HPSG (cf. Pollard and Sag (1994)) analysis which re-uses mechanisms applied to the Polish past tense forms in Kupść and Tseng (2005). For the present tense, we assume that there are two types of constructions: a past tense-like where there is an explicit verb introducing the marking, and a verb-less one where the marking is licensed by a predicative phrase. Present tense markings are the same elements as those in the past tense and we consider them affixes. In the present tense, however, their distribution is more restricted as in plural they cannot be detached from the verb. This is ensured by lexical constraints responsible for suffixation. In the present tense, the presence of a marking can be triggered either by the verb (copula) or by a predicative phrase. In case there is an overt copula, the analysis is essentially the same as for the past tense: the agreement requirement can be fulfilled locally by adding the suffix to the verb, or it has to be discharged in the course of syntactic formation if the marking is detached from the verb: the suffix requirement is transmitted along the trigger’s head projection whereas the presence of the affixed word is noted by every phrase the word is part of. Once the triggering and affixation specifications meet, the requirement is satisfied, yielding a well-formed syntactic structure. If the copula is not present, we do not stipulate an ellipsis analysis but consider the predicate to be the agreement trigger which propagates the agreement requirement into the syntactic structure. We assume that the requirement may

be met only in saturated predicative phrases, i.e., where the predicative phrase is the main predicate. This prevents affixation in secondary predicates where the predicate's subject is not realised but shared with the main predicate. The resulting phrase is always assigned a present tense semantics. Syntactically, however, the construction is a verbal projection only if the copula is present. Otherwise, the phrase has the same syntactic category as the predicative phrase, which accounts for different properties of negation in verbal and verbless copula constructions.

(1) present tense of *być*:

	SG	PL
1st	jest <b>em</b>	jest <b>eśmy</b>
2nd	jest <b>eś</b>	jest <b>eście</b>
3rd	jest	są

(2) past tense of *być* (masculine):

	SG	PL
1st	był <b>em</b>	był <b>śmy</b>
2nd	był <b>eś</b>	był <b>ście</b>
3rd	był	byli

- (3) a. Ja jest**em** głodny.  
I be.sg-1sg hungry  
b. **Jam** jest głodny.  
I-1sg be.sg hungry 'I am hungry.'
- (4) a. **Myśmy** \*jest / ??są głodni.  
we-1pl be.sg be.pl hungry  
b. **Myśmy** głodni.  
we-1pl hungry 'We are hungry.'  
c. **Jam** głodny.  
I-1sg hungry 'I am hungry.'
- (5) a. **Jam** jest zły, dlatego **żem**  
I-1sg be.sg angry because COMP-1sg  
głodny.  
hungry  
'I am angry because I am hungry.'  
b. \*? Tomek czyta książkę, dlatego  
Tom read.3sg book because  
że Piotr gazetę.  
COMP Peter newspaper  
'Tom reads a book because Peter [reads]  
a newspaper.'
- (6) a. ? Kim myślisz, że ja  
who.inst think.2sg COMP I  
jest**em**?  
be.sg-1sg

b. ? Kim myślisz, **żem** ja  
who.inst think.2sg COMP-1sg I  
jest?  
be.sg

c. \* Kim myślisz, **żem** ja?  
who.inst think.2sg COMP-1sg I  
'Who do you think I am?'

(7) a. Ja nie jest**em** Francuzem.  
I NEG be.sg-1sg French

b. **Jam** nie jest Francuzem.  
I-1sg NEG be.sg French  
'I am not a French.'

c. **Jam** nie Francuzem (\*, ale  
I-1sg NEG French but  
Polakiem).  
Pole

'I am not a French but a Pole.'

## References

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