

2nd edition

Polish

An Essential Grammar

Dana Bielec



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Polish

An Essential Grammar

Polish: An Essential Grammar is a user-friendly guide to all the important structures of this fascinating language. Presenting a fresh and accessible description of the language, this engaging grammar uses clear, jargon-free explanations and sets out the complexities of Polish in short, readable sections.

Key features include:

- new chapter on studying an inflected language, including detailed analysis of a typical text
- comprehensive descriptions of the parts of speech covered
- information presented clearly and logically in table form
- a wealth of real-life examples
- nine clearly-presented appendices.

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Dana Bielec is an experienced multilingual language tutor with a specialist qualification in the teaching of dyslexic students.

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Polish

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2nd Edition



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To my mother, Halina Augustowicz, who taught me to sing the language;
and to Christine Jones Wood who heard and loved the beauty of a
melody with missing notes.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this book:

acc.	accusative case
adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
app.	appendix
coll.	colloquial
comp.	comparative
cond.	conditional tense
conj.	conjunction
dat.	dative case
deter.	determinate verb/aspect
dir.	direct object
f./fem.	feminine gender
freq.	frequentative verb/aspect
fut.	future tense
gen.	genitive case
geog.	geographic location
imperf.	imperfective verb/aspect
indeter.	indeterminate verb/aspect
indir.	indirect object
infin.	infinitive
instr./inst.	instrumental case
lit.	literally
loc.	locative case
m./masc.	masculine gender
nom.	nominative case
n./neut.	neuter gender
num.	numeral
obj.	object

part.	particle
perf.	perfective verb/aspect
pl.	plural
prep.	preposition
pres.	present tense
pron.	pronoun
sing.	singular
subj.	subject
super.	superlative
vb.	verb
voc.	vocative case

Abbreviations

Preface

This book is for learners of Polish at all levels – beginner, improver, school/college or university student, tourist, teacher, businessman, lover of words and sounds. I have sought to explain English grammar simply but comprehensively so that your knowledge of how various parts of speech work together to create meaningful text will form a firm base for your study of Polish.

Polish is a very complex, and therefore very expressive, language. By putting information largely in tables I have made the mastery of it easier for you, for there is now no need to memorise everything. The many examples are drawn from everyday life and are often idiomatic, and sometimes colloquial. Using their structure, you can substitute vocabulary to suit your own needs and context.

Enjoy using this book. Enjoy learning the language. Above all, don't be afraid to practise and experiment. Therein lies mastery.

Nottingham, June 2011
Dana Bielec

Associated texts which provide practice in the grammar structures found in this Essential Grammar

Dana Bielec, *Basic Polish: A Grammar and Workbook* (Routledge 2008)

Dana Bielec, *Intermediate Polish: A Grammar and Workbook* (Routledge 2008)

Recommended reference works (always use the latest published edition)

The following are suitable for those who have mastered Polish to a high level or whose first language is Polish.

- 1 *Wielki Słownik Polsko-Angielski* (Great Polish-English Dictionary). A comprehensive 4-volume work published by Philip Wilson, Warsaw.
- 2 *Mały Słownik Języka Polskiego*. This is a smaller 1-volume Polish-Polish dictionary published by Philip Wilson, Warsaw.
- 3 *Słownik Poprawnej Polszczyzny*. This comprehensive Polish-Polish dictionary, published by Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw, explains the correct usage of many of the most difficult Polish words and expressions.
- 4 *Nowy Słownik Ortograficzny* (Polish orthographical dictionary). Published by Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw, this lists *spelling* changes within each word, e.g. due to tense, case ending, and vowel and consonant changes. *Meanings* of words are not given.

The following are suitable for learners whose first language is not Polish.

- 1 Klara Janecki, *301 Polish Verbs* (Barron's Educational Series, New York). This lists the most useful verbs alphabetically, giving their imperfective and perfective aspects, in all their tenses.
- 2 *4-volume English-Polish: Polish-English Dictionary* (2 volumes each way) published by Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw.

A word about pocket dictionaries

When choosing a dictionary, ensure that it gives the kind of information needed by English students of Polish, i.e. pronunciation of the Polish word, genitive singular (difficult to predict in masculine nouns) and an

indication of whether a verb is perfective or imperfective. If not, the dictionary is aimed at Polish students of English. Consider:

Size. An adequate dictionary lists around 45,000 words. Smaller ones not only list fewer words but are also more likely to list only the most common meanings of a word. Take several dictionaries of different sizes, look up some common English words and then cross-check by looking up each given Polish word. How much information is given? Does it make sense?

Content. For each word, a dictionary should state the part of speech (e.g. noun, verb) and any unusual features of the word like unexpected plural forms (e.g. **dziecko**: **dzieci**). Many users miss out by not understanding this information.

Print size and colour. The print size must be large enough to read clearly (e.g. **ż** and **ź** may look identical in a small print size). Dictionaries with headwords in a different colour are easier to use quickly.

Age. Language changes as new words appear. Ideally, use a dictionary no older than 3 years.

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PART I

The Polish Language

Chapter I

Alphabet

The Polish alphabet is as below. () indicates non-Polish letters imported in foreign words:

a ą b c ć d e ę f g h i j k l ł m n ń o ó p (q) r s ś t u (v) w (x) y z ź ż

Note: The diacritical mark found on letters **ć, ń, ś,** and **ź** is, for simplicity, referred to as an ‘accent’ in this book.

Chapter 2

Pronunciation and stress

2.1 Pronunciation

Every letter in Polish, apart from **ch, cz, sz, dź, dż, rz**, is said separately. There are no silent letters, but the letter **i** does affect pronunciation (see 2.4 and 2.10).

2.2 Single vowels

a	as in <i>hat</i>	matka, aleja, brat
e	as in <i>met</i>	sekretarz, tekst, jestem
i	as in <i>feet</i>	blisko, ostatni, gitara
o/oo	as in <i>pot</i>	noga, Polska, zoo
u	as in <i>whose</i>	student, ulica, papuga
ó	as in <i>cool</i>	góra, pokój, córka
y	as in <i>dim</i>	tygrys, syn, dobry

2.3 Nasal vowels

ą	as in <i>don</i>	mąka, gorący, książka
ąb, ąp	as in <i>Tom</i>	trąba, ząb, kąpać
ę	as in <i>ten</i>	ręka, węgiel, pięć
ęb, ęp	as in <i>them</i>	bęben, zęby, tępy
<i>Final ę</i>	tends to sound e	idę, muszę
<i>Final ie</i>	tends to sound ie	się, imię

2.4 Double vowels

These are mainly of foreign origin and are pronounced singly. However, in words of Polish origin, as underlined in the list below, an 'i' followed by another vowel within a word is not pronounced singly. Usually it softens the preceding consonant, adding a hint of y to it, e.g. **pies** [pyes], **bieda** [byeda], **mięso** [myenso]. You can think of the i being pronounced as an English 'y'. In the case of **ci**, **si**, **zi**, **dzi** plus a following vowel, the i merely softens the preceding consonant, e.g. **pociąg**, **siano**, **ziarno**, **dziadek** [pochong, shano, zearno, jadek].

ai	Haiti		
ao	aorta	kakao	baon
au	pauza	nauka	autor
ea	Gwinea	reakcja	teatr
ei	ateista	kleić	kofeina
eo	Leonard	Teodor	meteorolog
eu	Tadeusz	liceum	muzeum
oa	toaleta		
oe	poeta	poezja	
oi	moi	stoi	choinka
ou	poufny	pouczać	douczać
ia	<u>Maria</u>	<u>kwiat</u>	<u>miasto</u>
ią	<u>piątek</u>	<u>związek</u>	<u>pięćdziesiąt</u>
ie	<u>pies</u>	<u>kamień</u>	<u>cukier</u>
ię	<u>mięso</u>	<u>imię</u>	<u>piękny</u>
io	<u>anioł</u>	<u>bioreę</u>	<u>miotła</u>
ió	<u>pióro</u>	<u>miód</u>	<u>zbiór</u>
iu	<u>biuro</u>	<u>Mariusz</u>	<u>kostium</u>
ua	statua	aktualność	
ue	duet	muezin	puenta
ui	suita	uiszczać	truizm
uo	uogólnić	uosobić	uodporniać

2.5 Consonants

Consonants pronounced as in English are not shown.

Note: Soft consonants **ć, ci, ń, ni, ś, si, ź, zi**, have no direct equivalent in English; they are softer than the nearest English sound.

w	as in van	wino, kawa, słowo
l	as in <i>last</i>	lampa, ból, królowa
ł ¹	as in <i>full</i> or as <i>w</i>	stół, mały, Wisła
j	as in <i>yes</i>	jesień, jajko, kraj
ch ²	as in <i>hat</i>	chleb, bochenek, marchew
ń, ni	as in <i>onion</i>	Gdańsk, słońce, grudzień [soft]
c	as in <i>cats</i>	noc, chłopiec, cytryna
ć, ci	as in <i>cheese</i>	pracować, dziewięć, mówić [soft]
cz	as in <i>chair</i>	paczka, czas, wieczór
ck	as <i>tsk</i>	niemiecki, słowacki, Malicki
ś, si	as in <i>sheet</i>	środa, dziś, świat [soft]
sz	as in <i>show</i>	kapelusz, szynka, groszek
szcz	as in <i>fresh cheddar</i>	płaszcz, deszcz, szczęście
ść, ści	as in Finnish <i>cheese</i>	sześć, radość, ściana, dwieście [soft]
dz	as in <i>goods</i>	dzwon, bardzo, narodzenie
dź, dzi	as in <i>jeans</i>	dźwig, dziecko, godzina [soft]
dż	as in <i>jam</i>	dżem, dżentelmen, dżinsy [Rare. Found mainly in foreign words]
ź, zi	as in <i>Rhodesia</i>	źle, późno, ziemia, zielony [soft]
ź ³	as in <i>pleasure</i>	książka, różowy, życie
rz ³	as in <i>pleasure</i>	rzeka, drzewo, marzec

¹ Colloquially, **ł** is not pronounced between consonants and at word end: **jabłko, poszedł**.

² **ch** and **h** are pronounced identically, except in foreign words transcribed into Polish (e.g. **czelendź**: challenge) where **ch** is said as Polish **cz**. **Ch**, not **h**, is written in Polish words which have derivatives in **-sz** (e.g. **duch**: **duśza**; **suchy**: **suszyć**), and also at word end, e.g. **dach, mech, maluch** and case endings **-ich** and **-ach**. The exception is **druh**.

³ **ź** and **rz** are pronounced identically. In a few words, like **marznąć** from **mróz**, **rz** is said as two separate letters.

2.6 Identical double consonants

Two identical consonants together are each said separately, e.g.

An-na, in-ny, lek-ki, mięk-ki, uczen-nica, Malic-cy (plural of **Malicki**).

2.7 Consonant types

Polish, like English, contains voiced and unvoiced consonants. The terms ‘voiced’ and ‘unvoiced’ are very appropriate because they describe exactly what is happening. For example, when we say ‘b’ and ‘p’ our lips and tongue are roughly in the same position, except that the ‘b’ sound is said with more force. This causes our larynx to vibrate and hence produce a voiced sound. The ‘p’ sound, said with little force is, therefore, unvoiced.

When a spoken language is developing, people put sounds together so that the words which they create are as easy as possible to say. A word starting with ‘sp’, in which both consonants are unvoiced and flow into each other naturally, is easier to say than one starting with ‘zp’, where the ‘z’ is voiced but the ‘p’ is unvoiced. To say ‘zp’ one has to say ‘z’, stop, and then add ‘p’. The unvoiced equivalents of **b, d, g, w, z** are **p, t, k, f, s** (see 2.8).

If you look in a Polish dictionary you find that words often begin with **sp, zb, st, zd, sk, zg, sf** (groupings where both consonants are either voiced or unvoiced) rather than with **sb, zp, sd, zt, sg, zk, zf** (groupings where both voiced and unvoiced consonants are present). Exceptions do exist, such as **kw** and **sw** (unvoiced followed by voiced). The latter exists alongside its equivalent **zw** (both voiced). However, in the many words starting with **kw**, mainly but not exclusively transcribed from foreign words in ‘qu’, such as **kwartet** and **kwalifikacja**, the sound becomes **kf**, as is the case in Polish words starting with **kw**, like **kwiat** and **kwas**. In the few Polish words starting with **sw** (e.g. **swój, swoboda**) **sw** is said as **sf**. Words starting with **sf**, like **sfera** and **sfinks**, are foreign in origin.

When Polish became a written language, the spelling of a word was usually based on its pronunciation. Foreign words entering the language usually adopted a Polish spelling, e.g. *credit, business* (both from English), *plein air, cadre* (both from French), *Vorhang* (German) and *credenza* (Italian) became **kredyt, biznes, plener, kadra, firana and kredens**. *Xerox* often became **ksero**. Under the influence of American English pronunciation,

the short 'a' sound in adopted words was often transcribed as 'e'. So, *businessman*, *match* and *flash* became *bisnezmen*, *mecz* and *flesz*.

In English, although we are mostly unaware of it, voicing of unvoiced consonants occurs predominantly when the preceding consonant is voiced. So, in *jobs*, *lads*, *dogs*, *gives*, *glazes*, the 's' is voiced to become a 'z', but in *chops*, *boots*, *books*, *toffs*, *glasses*, the 's' remains unvoiced. Words ending with a final sound 'f' mainly adopt a plural with a 'v' sound. So, *leaf*, *wife* become *leaves*, *wives*. But, *roof*, *chief* remain as *roofs*, *chiefs*. Another phenomenon can also occur. In the English pronunciation of *houses* and *blouses*, the fact that the final 's' has assumed a 'z' sound, forces the preceding 's' to assume a 'z' sound also. In Scotland, *houses* is usually said with two 's' sounds, while the pronunciation of *blouses* can vary regionally.

2.8 Devoicing of voiced consonants

A voiced consonant is commonly pronounced as its unvoiced equivalent:

- (a) at the end of a word
- (b) when standing before or after an unvoiced consonant (which may be in another word). This most often occurs with **b, d, w, z**.

Voiced	→	Unvoiced	Examples
b	→	p	chleb [hlep] babka [bapka]
d	→	t	naród [naroot] wódka [vootka] od Tomka [ot Tomka]
g	→	k	Bóg [Book]
w	→	f	krew [kref] wtorek [ftorek] święto [shfyento]
z	→	s	wóz [voos] z Piotrem [s Pyotrem]
ź	→	ś	wież [vyesh] buźka [booshka]
dz	→	c	wódz [voots]
dź	→	ć	chodź [hochsh] idźcie [eechche]
ż, rz	→	sz	też [tesh] chrzan [hshan] lekarz [lekash]
dź	→	cz	bridź [breech]

2.9 Voicing of unvoiced consonants

The unvoiced consonants below, when in front of voiced consonants except *w* and *rz*, are voiced:

<i>Unvoiced</i>		<i>Voiced</i>	<i>Examples</i>
ś	→	ź	prośba [proźba]
cz	→	dź	liczba [leedźba]
k	→	g	także [tagże]

2.10 Effect of vowel *i* on preceding consonant

The vowel *i* softens the preceding consonant. Thus, consonants *c*, *n*, *s* and *z*, when followed by *i*, have the same sound as soft consonants *ć*, *ń*, *ś* and *ź*.

If, when adding endings, we place an *i* after a consonant which has an ´ accent, the consonant loses its accent because the *i* performs the required softening. Thus, Polish does not have the combinations *ći*, *ńi*, *śi*, *ści*, *dźi* or *źi*. This is most clearly seen in plurals:

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
miłość (love)	miłości	gość (guest)	goście
wieś (village)	wsie	koń (horse)	konie
tydzień (week)	tygodnie	łódź (boat)	łodzi
artysta (artist)	artyści	pianista (pianist)	pianiści

If we place an *i* after a consonant which has no ´ accent, the *i* softens the consonant which, in turn, softens the preceding consonant if that can be softened by the addition of an ´ accent. The softening effect continues backwards through the word until we reach a vowel or a consonant which cannot take an ´ accent.

This is best seen in the formation of (a) adverbs from adjectives, (b) in the comparative of adjectives and adverbs and (c) in some plurals:

- (a) **wczesny** (early) **wcześniej** (earlier) **n** becomes **ni**, so **s** becomes **ś**
(b) **jasno** (brightly) **jaśniej** (more brightly)
(a) **ciasny** (tight) **ciaśniejszy** (tighter)
(c) **mężczyzna** (man) **mężczyźni** (men) **n** becomes **ni**, so **z** becomes **ź**
(c) **więzień** (prisoner) **więźniowie** (prisoners)

Effect of
vowel *i* on
preceding
consonant

2.11 Normal stress

In words of Polish origin, the second last syllable in a word is stressed:

matka telefon ulica adres toaleta rower

This means that the stress in a word often changes when the word is inflected (i.e. endings are added):

rower na rowerze z rowerami

In compound words made up of several elements, usually a noun and a prefix each with its own meaning, the stress remains as it was in each of the joined elements:

eksmąż, eksżona, arcybiskup, wiceprezes, wiceprezydent

An acronym is pronounced as one stressed syllable if possible, e.g. **ZUS** (Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych) or as separate letters with the stress on the last letter, e.g. **PKS** [pekaes] (Polska Kolej Samochodowa).

In most words ending in **-ia** or **-io**, the **i** is pronounced as 'y', causing the **-ia** or **-io** to become one syllable **ya** or **yo**. Hence, the syllable before the **-ia** or **-io**, being the second last syllable, is stressed:

piekarnia kawiarnia cukiernia księgarnia ziemia historia

suknia studnia geografia lilia sympatia radio studio tanio

In words ending in **-sia**, **-cia**, **-zia** and **-dzia** the **i** serves to soften the preceding letter. So, the group is pronounced as one syllable **śa**, **ća**, **źa**, **dźa** and the preceding syllable, being the second last syllable, is stressed:

mamusia Zosia ciocia babcia buzia Magdzia

2.12 Abnormal stress

Stress falls on the third last syllable in the following:

- (a) Greek and Latin words: **gramatyka**, **matematyka**, **fizyka**, **turystyka**, **ceramika**, **botanika**.
- (b) The four numbers: **cztery**sta, **siedem**set, **osiem**set, **dziewięć**set. **Sta** and **set** are simply tagged on, keeping the stress on the penultimate syllable of the original number (see 12.1).

- (c) Both forms (masculine and non-masculine) of past tense verbs in the first and second person plural. This is because the ending itself has two syllables, e.g.

mieliśmy (masc.) *miałyśmy* (non-masc.) we had [1st plural]
czytaliście (masc.) *czytałyście* (non-masc.) you were reading
 [2nd plural]

- (d) The conditional tense. Stress remains as it was in the past tense forms of the verb which were used to make this tense, e.g.

mielibyśmy (masc.) *miałybyśmy* (non-masc.) we would have
 [1st plural]
czytalibyście (masc.) *czytałybyście* (non-masc.) you would read
 [2nd plural]

2.13 Stress in prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases are treated as one unit. If a monosyllabic preposition, e.g. **dla**, **u**, is followed by a monosyllabic pronoun, e.g. **nas**, **mnie**, the stress is on the preposition:

dla nas u mnie za nim [for us, at my house, after him]

In monosyllabic prepositions an **e** is often added to aid pronunciation of a difficult consonant group, e.g. **bez** + **e** = **beze**. To some extent, this is a matter of personal preference. In this case, the stress is normally on the **e**:

beze mnie przede mną [without me, before me]

Normal stress may be retained if the preposition with the extra **e** stands before a noun:

przede wszystkim [above all/before everything]

2.14 Stress in **nie** and its verb

These are treated as one unit. If the verb has one syllable, the stress is on **nie**:

nie mam nie był nie idź

If the verb has more than one syllable, the stress is as normal:

nie mamy nie była nie idziemy

Vowel and consonant alternations

In words of Polish origin mainly, vowels and consonants often change (alternate) predictably before certain endings. The alternation patterns are shown in the tables below.

Note: Vowel and consonant alternations often occur between different words from the same root, e.g. **waga: ważyć, para: parzyć, lato: letni, kwiat: kwiecień, jadać: jedzenie.**

3.1 Vowel alternations

These occur as below.

- 1 In nouns, in the locative singular (all genders), in the dative singular (feminine), and in the plural (all genders).
- 2 In verbs, mainly:
 - (a) In the present tense, e.g. **biorę/bierze** [from **brać**]
 - (b) In the past tense, e.g. **musieć/musiałem, wziąć/wzięłem**
 - (c) In the conditional tense, made from the 3rd person singular/plural forms of the past tense
 - (d) In the infinitives of verbs (see 5.4), most of which have either an imperfective and perfective aspect, e.g. **odwiedzać/odwiedzić, odpoczywać/odpocząć, umierać/umrzeć** or two imperfective aspects, e.g. **nosić/nieść**.
- 3 In adjectives and adverbs (see Chapters 8 and 9):
 - (a) In the comparative forms, e.g. **wesoły/weselszy** [adj.], **wesoło/weselej** [adv.]
 - (b) In masculine plural forms of some adjectives, e.g. **zmęczony** [masc. sing]/**zmęczeni** [masc. pl.]

Vowel alternations

Original:

alternated	Nouns	Verbs
a: e ¹	świat (m.): świecie (world) [Loc. sing.]	jadę: jedziesz (travel)
e: o	ziele (m.): ziola (herb) [Nom. pl.]	wieźć: wozić (transport)
o: a	–	wykończyć: wykańczać (exhaust)
o: e	nasiono (n.) (kernel): nasienie (seed, sperm) [Nom. sing.] ²	wiozę: wiesz (transport)
o: ó	głowa (f.): głów (head) [Gen. pl.]	robić: rób (do)
ó: o	róg (m.): rogi (corner) [Nom. pl.]	móc: mogą (be able)
ó: e	popiół (m.): popiele (ash) [Loc. sing.]	–
ą: ę	ząb (m.): zęby (tooth) [Nom. pl.]	ciągnął: ciągnęła (pull)
ę: ą	święto (n.): święt (holiday) [Gen. pl.]	–
e: –	wieś (f.): wsi (village) [Dat./Loc. sing.]	szedłem: szłam (walk)
–: e	łza (f.): łez (teardrop) [Gen. pl.]	–

¹ Vowel alternations tend not to occur in foreign words, e.g. **aparat: aparacie, konsul: konsulacie**.

² Vowel alternation has resulted in two different singular nouns.

3.2 Consonant alternations

Polish, as with all languages, has hard and soft consonants (see table over). Unusually, it also has functionally soft consonants. These are hard consonants which adopt endings appropriate to soft consonants, e.g. **koń** (sing.): **konie** (pl.) but also **klucz** (sing.): **klucze** (pl.).

When we add certain endings to words, hard consonants alternate with corresponding soft or functionally soft consonants. Sometimes, functionally soft consonants alternate with corresponding soft consonants or vice versa.

Consonant alternations occur mainly in the locative singular of nouns (all genders), in the dative singular of feminine nouns, in the plural of masculine ‘men’ nouns and adjectives, and in the comparative forms of adjectives and adverbs. For full details see those chapters. In verbs, consonant alternations occur mainly within the present tense.

Polish consonants and possible alternations (read table vertically)

<i>Hard</i>	t	d	s	z	n	k	g	ch	ch	ł	b	p	f	w	m	r
<i>Soft</i>	ć	dź	ś	ź	ń	ki	gi	chi	ś	li	bi	pi	fi	wi	mi	
	ci	dzi	si	zi	ni				si							
<i>Funct.</i>	c	dz	sz	ż		c	ż	sz	ł							rz
<i>soft</i>	cz	dź				cz	dź									

c, s, z, dz, n are softened by the addition of an accent thus: **ć, ś, ź, dź, ń**. They can, in certain circumstances change further, the ´ accent being replaced by **i**. If the remaining hard consonants do not alternate to a different consonant altogether, they are softened by the addition of an **i**. For examples see table below.

Polish does not contain the letter groupings **ge** or **ke**, except in borrowed foreign words, e.g. **geologia, Eugenia, keks, kelner, keczup, kemping**. The foreign grouping **gy** is normally transcribed as **gi**, e.g. **gimnazjum, gimnastyka**. Adjectives whose stems end in **g** or **k** take the ending **i**, not **y**, in the masculine nominative singular, e.g. **drogi, wysoki**. The neuter singular adjective ends in **gie/kie**, e.g. **drogie, wysokie** (see 8.1.1.2). Nouns whose stems end in **g(a)** or **k(a)**, like **pociąg, bank, noga, matka**, take the ending **i**, not **y**, in the nominative plural, e.g. **pociągi, banki, nogi, matki**.

Consonant alternations (accent may be further replaced by i)*

	<i>Nouns [f. sing. Nom.: Loc]</i>	<i>Adjectives [m. (men) Nom. sing.: pl.]</i>	<i>Verbs [1st person sing.: 2nd person sing.]</i>
b: bi	szyba: szybie (glass)	gruby: grubi (fat)	–
p: pi	mapa: mapie (map)	ślepy: ślepi (blind)	–
f: fi	szafa: szafie (cupboard)–		–
w: wi	głowa: głowie (head)	gotowy: gotowi (ready)	rwę: rwiesz (tear)
m: mi	rama: ramie (frame)	wiadomy: wiadomi (known)	wzmę: weźmiesz (take)
ł: l	szkoła: szkole (school)	mały: mali (small)	–
l: li	–	–	myślę: myślisz (think)

	<i>Nouns</i> [f. sing. Nom.: Loc]	<i>Adjectives</i> [m. (men) Nom. sing.: pl.]	<i>Verbs</i> [1st person sing.: 2nd person sing.]
k: c	Polska: Polsce (Poland)	bliski: bliscy (near)	–
k: cz	–	–	tłukę: tłuczysz (break)
g: dz	droga: drodze (way)	drogi: drodzy (dear)	–
g: ż	–	–	mogę: możesz (be able)
ch: sz	mucha: musze (fly)	–	–
ch: ś*	–	głuchy: głusi (deaf)	–
c: ć*	–	–	płacę: płacisz (pay)
t: ć*	chata: chacie (hut)	bogaty: bogaci (rich)	plotę: pleciesz (plait)
d: dź*	woda: wodzie (water)	młody: młodzi (young)	kładę: kładziesz (lay)
dź: dź*	–	–	jeżdżę: jeździsz (travel)
s: ś*	kasa: kasie (cash desk)	–	niosę: niesiesz (carry)
sz: ś*	–	pierwszy: pierwsi (first)	muszę: musisz (have to)
z: ź*	gaza: gazie (gauze)	–	widzę: widzisz (see)
ż: ź*	–	duży: duzi (big)	wożę: wozisz (transport)
n: ń*	żona: żonie (wife)	smutny: smutni (sad)	biegnę: biegniesz (run)
r: rz	dziura: dziurze (hole)	stary: starzy (old)	piołę: pierzesz (wash)
ś: śl	Wisła: Wiśle (Wisła)	dorosły: dorośli (grown)	–
st: ść*	lista: liście (list)	prosty: prości (straight)	–
sn: śń*	sosna: sośnie (pine)	–	–
zd: źdź*	gwiazda: gwieździe (star)	–	–
zn: źń*	ojczyzna: ojczyźnie (homeland)	–	–

Studying an inflected language

4.1 What is an inflected language?

Polish is an inflected language belonging, with languages like Russian, Serbian and Bulgarian, to the Slavonic branch of the Indo-European group of languages. Latin and Greek, although not Slavonic, are also inflected. In an inflected language the endings on words change according to the function of the word in the sentence. Verbs change according to their conjugation, nouns according to their declension.

Briefly, dictionaries list words in their uninflected form, but may also state unusual inflected forms.

<i>Part of speech</i>	<i>Generally stated in description</i>
Noun	Nominative singular (ojciec , matka , dziecko : father, mother, child), but often also the genitive singular and nominative plural.
Pronoun	Nominative singular (on , tamten : he, that one).
Adjective	Positive form of masculine singular (ładny : pretty). The comparative form (here ładniejszy : prettier) is not shown if it is formed in the normal way by adding -(i)ejszy to the positive. But, for szybki (quick) the comparative szybszy (quicker) appears.
Adverb	Positive form (ładnie : nicely). The comparative form (here ładniej : more nicely) is not shown if it is formed in the normal way by adding -(ie)j to the positive. But, for szybko (quickly) the comparative szybciej (more quickly) appears.
Verb	Infinitive, often the 1st and 2nd person singular of the present tense, and whether the verb is of imperfective or perfective aspect (czytać : imperf. or przeczytać : perf.)
Preposition	Grammatical case used after it. An extra -e to help with pronunciation may apply, e.g. w , we (in); z , ze (from, with).
Numeral	Usually <i>numeral plus card.</i> (cardinal: one, two) or <i>ord.</i> (ordinal : first, second).

<i>Part of speech</i>	<i>Generally stated in description</i>
Conjunction	Simply <i>conj.</i> and meaning.
Interjection/ Exclamation	Either <i>interject.</i> or <i>exclam.</i> and meaning.

4.2 How do words change in Polish?

<i>Part of speech</i>	<i>Possible changes</i>
Noun	<p>Every noun belongs to a particular declension (group identified from its prevalent characteristics). The gender (masculine, feminine, neuter) of a noun is fixed. Nouns change (decline) to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Show grammatical case, by adding, removing or changing the original ending according to the pattern prescribed for their noun declension. Ojciec (Nom. sing) becomes ojca (Acc. and Gen. sing.); ojcem (Instr. sing). Show number (singular or plural) in all grammatical cases. Ojciec (Nom. sing) becomes ojcowie (Nom. pl.); ojcom (Dat. pl.).
Pronoun	<p>A pronoun has the same gender (masculine, feminine, neuter) as the noun which it replaces. Pronouns decline according to the pattern prescribed for their pronoun declension. On (he) (Nom. sing) becomes jego (Acc. and Gen. sing.); nim (Instr. sing). Oni (they) (Nom. pl.) becomes ich (Acc. and Gen. pl.); nimi (Instr. pl.).</p>
Adjective	<p>Adjectives, e.g. szybki, agree in number, gender and case with the noun or pronoun which they describe. Given three genders and seven grammatical cases in the singular and the same again in the plural, each adjective could potentially have 42 different forms. In reality, this reduces markedly because some cases and genders use the same form of the adjective. Comparative (-er) and superlative (-est) forms of adjectives (szybszy, najszybszy) also decline as above.</p>
Adverb	<p>Adverbs, e.g. szybko, have comparative and superlative forms (szybciej, najszybciej). However, they are otherwise invariable.</p>
Verb	<p>These cause great problems. Each verb has a fixed number of tenses depending on its aspect: imperfective, like czytać or perfective like przeczytać. Each verb also belongs to a defined conjugation. Each conjugation has defined endings for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person singular (I, you, he/she/it) as well as for 1st, 2nd and 3rd person plural (we, you, they). In the past, future and conditional tenses, there are unique forms for masculine, feminine and neuter subjects.</p>

<i>Part of speech</i>	<i>Possible changes</i>
Preposition	These are invariable. However nouns (both singular and plural) standing after a preposition decline according to the grammatical case required by the preposition.
Numeral	These cause major problems. Cardinal numbers have special forms for masculine nouns and collective nouns, e.g. trzy (three) becomes trzej (masc.) and troje (collective). Ordinal numerals (first, second, etc.) decline as adjectives, agreeing with the number, gender and case of their associated noun.
Conjunction	These are invariable but obey special rules about the use of commas to separate words, phrases and clauses in a sentence.

4.3 What are the most common student errors?

Comprehension of an inflected language is seriously reduced by failing to identify parts of speech correctly. Students most often fail to identify:

- 1 Gender, number and case of noun.
- 2 Nouns with atypical endings, e.g. **artysta** (masc.), **noc** (fem.).
- 3 Similar endings:
 - (a) Dative singular **-owi** confused with masc. nominative plural **-owie**, or even parts of a verb, e.g. **powie** (he will say).
 - (b) Masculine genitive singular in **-a** (**ojca**) confused with feminine nominative singular noun in **-a** (**praca**).
 - (c) Dative plural in **-om** (**matkom**, **ojcom**) or genitive plural of feminine noun without an ending (**matek** from **matka**) identified as masculine nominative singular noun ending in consonant or masculine diminutive ending in **-ek**.
 - (d) Genitive plural of feminine nouns in **-cia** (**cioc** from **ciocia**) identified as infinitive of verb.
 - (e) Neuter plural in **-a** (**pole**: **pola**) identified as feminine singular.
 - (f) Feminine singular in **-i** (**pani**) or instrumental plural ending **-ami** identified as nominative plural ending in **-i**.
- 4 Diminutives of noun, e.g. **stolik**, **stoliczek**, both from **stół** (table), confused with **stolek** (stool).
- 5 Similar words, like **nic** (nothing) and **nić** (thread) or **wesołe** (happy) and **wesele** (wedding).
- 6 Negative verb (there is a **nie** somewhere in the sentence). Hence, the reader does not realise that the direct object of the verb will normally be in genitive case unless the verb itself demands use of a different case.

- 7 Person and tense of verb. This relies on knowledge of the declension type of the verb.
- 8 Aspect of verb – normally imperfective or perfective. However, a few verbs have two imperfective aspects.
- 9 Gender and person in the past, future and conditional tense of verbs (**pisali: pisały**).
- 10 Verb ending **-a** (**mieszka**: he/she/it lives) confused with feminine nouns, most of which also end in **-a** (**miska**: bowl).
- 11 Gender, number and case of pronoun e.g. **on** (he) changes to **jemu, jego** in different cases.
- 12 Gender, number and case of adjective.
- 13 Special masculine plural form of adjective relating to ‘men’ (**dobry: dobrzy**).
- 14 Adjective confused with adverb, e.g. **daleki** with **daleko**.
- 15 Comparative and superlative forms of adjective and adverb, especially if irregular, not recognised (**duży: większy, długo: dłużej**).
- 16 Irregular nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs.
- 17 Inflected forms of numbers (**dwa: dwaj; dwóch: dwoje**).
- 18 Word has vowel and/or consonant alternations (**świat: świecie, Magda: Magdzie**).
- 19 Question word is in an unexpected case. **Co** (what) and **kto** (who) are obviously different but **czym, czemu** are confused with **kim, komu**.

4.4 How to study a Polish text

Word order in a Polish sentence rarely follows the *subject–verb–object* order prevalent in English. In addition, especially in speech or for emphasis, associated words are often separated, e.g. adjective split from nouns, or pronoun split from verb. For example:

W jednym tylko byłem sklepie instead of *Byłem tylko w jednym sklepie*.
(I went to only one shop.)

Takie chcesz oglądać filmy? instead of *Chcesz oglądać takie filmy?* (You want to watch such films?)

Marta dwóch ma synów instead of *Marta ma dwóch synów*. (Martha has two sons.)

Dobry kupiłeś słownik? Instead of *Kupiłeś dobry słownik?* (Did you buy a good dictionary?)

Czemu ty tak późno wracasz? instead of *Czemu wracasz tak późno?* (Why do you return so late?)

When faced with a Polish text, it is a mistake to start at the beginning of a sentence and translate word for word. Rather:

- 1 Check if the sentence is a statement or a question.
- 2 Find the verb (s).
- 3 Identify if each verb is a tense or an infinitive. If you find an infinitive, it often follows an auxiliary verb (e.g. **Mogę** [auxiliary] **przyjść** [infinitive]; I can come) which you must also find.
- 4 Identify the person of the verb.
- 5 Identify if the verb is positive (its object is normally in the accusative case) or negative its object is most probably in the genitive case).
- 6 Find the subject of the verb.
- 7 Is the subject singular or plural?
- 8 Find the gender of the subject. Gender affects any associated adjectives and also the formation of past, future and conditional tenses.
- 9 Identify any adjectives and adverbs.
- 10 Divide the sentence into separate clauses. Clauses normally begin with a conjunction (*and, although*) or a relative pronoun/adjective (*who, which*).
- 11 Divide the clauses into phrases, often containing a preposition (*with my father, at the bus stop, near the shop*).
- 12 In an inflected language, nouns and adjectives rarely appear in the nominative singular. To get the meaning, you must find the dictionary form of these words by working backwards. In the phrase **przy obiedzie** (at lunch), if you identify **obiedzie** as the locative singular of **obiad**, you can look up the meaning.
- 13 Remember that *a, the, some, any* do not exist in Polish (although there are ways of making your meaning clearer). Normally, context will dictate meaning. For example, **z psem** could mean *with a dog, with his dog, with their dog*, etc.

4.5 Sample text

Note: Bold = verb, uppercase = noun, italics = adjective, underline = adverb. Notice how:

- a noun rarely appears in its nominative singular form; various case endings are used, especially for direct objects and after prepositions
- a subject rarely precedes its verb.

- a mix of perfective and imperfective verbs, some reflexive others non-reflexive, is used.
- a mix of past, present and future tense is used, along with some imperatives.
- personal pronouns (I, you, he, etc.) are normally contained within the verb.
- an adjective sometimes follows the associated noun, rather than preceding it.

Skrećiliśmy w lewo, żeby najszybszą DROGĄ dojechać do PRZYJACIÓŁ. Było już strasznie późno. Zbliżała się jedenasta. A mroźno! Zapadała też gęsta MGŁA.

Jechaliśmy główną SZOSĄ. Po prawej STRONIE jakieś PRZEDSZKOLE, mała PRZYCHODNIA lekarska, zamrożone DZIAŁKI, na których z PEWNOŚCIĄ już nic nie rosło. Po lewej, KIOSKI, STRAGANY. Chyba tu w DNIĘ powszednie odbywały się TARGI. Dalej, jakiś PARKING. Nagle zahamowałam.

– Co ty? Co się dzieje? – spytała KASIA.

– Patrz, tam na PARKINGU pod DRZEWEK. *Ten stary POLONEZ.* Czemu on tam tak samotnie stoi?

– Ależ, MAMO, daj SPOKÓJ! Tam MŁODZIEŻ się całuje.

– Nie wierzę. Podjedźmy bliżej. Może stało się coś złego.

Wsiadaliśmy z WOZU i po cichutku zbliżyliśmy się do SAMOCHODU. Przednie ŚWIATŁA włączone. DRZWI zamknięte na KLUCZ. W SAMOCHODZIE było tylko dwoje DZIECI. CHŁOPCZYK miał może osiem LAT, a DZIEWCZYNKA chyba ze cztery. W lodowatym POJEŹDZIE oboje mocno spały. Gdzie RODZICE? Ani ŚLADU. Czemu tych BIEDAKÓW tak zostawiono na *pustym* PARKINGU *należącym* do *ogromnego* SKLEPU *spożywczego*? No, i do tego w *NOC Wigilijną*, kiedy wszyscy powinni być u siebie w *DOMU* przy *STOLE wigilijnym*. Co mogło się stać RODZICOM?

– No, i co teraz? – spytała KASIA.

Dzwonię na KOMENDĘ. Tam zawsze jest ktoś na *ostrym* DYŻURZE. Przyjadą natychmiast. Włamią się do SAMOCHODU i obudzą *śpiących*. Wyjaśnią *całą* SPRAWĘ.

– Miejmy NADZIEJĘ. Przecież tu chodzi o *małutkie* DZIECIAKI.

Translation

We turned left in order to reach our friends by the quickest route. It was already terribly late. Not far off eleven o'clock. And freezing! A thick fog was falling too.

We were travelling along the main road. On the right, some play school, a tiny doctor's surgery, frozen allotments, on which surely nothing was growing by now. On the left, kiosks, market stalls. There were probably markets here on working days. Further on, a car park. Suddenly, I braked.

"Hey, what's going on?" asked Kate.

Look, there in the car park, under the tree. That old Polonez. Why is it standing there all on its own?

"For goodness' sake, Mum! Are you mad? It's youngsters kissing."

"I don't believe it. Let's go nearer. Maybe something's wrong."

We got out of the van and quietly approached the car. Front lights on. Door locked. There were only two children in the car. The little boy was perhaps eight years old and the little girl about four. Both were fast asleep in the freezing vehicle. Where were their parents? No sign of them. Why had these poor kids been left in an empty car park belonging to a huge food shop? And on Christmas Eve too, when everyone ought to be at home at the celebration meal. What had happened to their parents?

"Well, what now?" asked Kate.

"I'll phone the police station. There's always someone on emergency duty there. They'll get here right away. They'll break into the car and wake the sleepers. They'll sort things out."

"Let's hope so. After all, it's a matter of tiny kids here."

Word analysis

Only significant words are analysed. For verbs, infinitive and aspect are given. Pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions are omitted if their meaning is clear from the English translation.

Word	Origin
skręciliśmy	skręcić (perf.). Past. Ending liśmy is 2nd person pl. fem.
najszybszą drogą	superlative adj. + noun, fem. sing. Instr. case for 'means to an end'.
dojechać	verb (perf.), infinitive after żeby .
przyjaciół	gen. after do. Naszych (our) is implied.
było	past of być , Ending o is 3rd person sing. neut.
zbliżała się	zbliżyć się (imperf.). Reflexive. Past. Ending ała is 3rd person sing. fem.
jedenasta	ordinal number. Godzina (hour) fem. omitted. Subject of zbliżała się .
zapadała	zapadać (imperf.). Past. Ending ała is 3rd person sing. fem.
gęsta mgła	adj. + noun. Fem. sing. Subject of zapadała .
jechaliśmy	jechać (imperf.). Past. Ending liśmy is 2nd person plural, fem.
główną szosą	adj. + noun. Instr. case for 'means to an end'. Fem. sing.
prawej stronie	adj. + noun. Fem. sing. Loc. after po . Verb było (was) omitted.
na których	loc. pl. (on which) referring to działki (fem. pl.).
z pewnością	instrum. after z . Fem. sing.
nic nie	double negative nic + nie (nothing). Subject of rosło .
rosło	rosnąć (imperf.). Past. Ending ło is 3rd person, sing. neut.
odbywały się	odbywać się (imperf.). Reflexive. Past. Ending ąły is 3rd person pl., masc. (non-men).
targi	masc pl. Subject of odbywały się .
dalej	adv. from daleko . Comparative.
zahamowałam	zahamować (perf.). Past. Ending łam is 1st person, sing. fem.
się dzieje	dziać się (imperf.) Reflexive. Present. 3rd person sing.
spytała	spytać (perf.). Past. 3rd person sing. fem.
patrz	patrzyć (imperf.) Imperative, 2nd person sing.
czemu	question word 'why'.
samotnie	adv. from samotny .
stoi	stać (imperf.). Present. 3rd person sing.
mamo	vocative. Fem. sing.
daj	dać (perf.). Imperative. 2nd person sing.
się całuje	całować się (imperf.). Reflexive. Present. 3rd person sing.
wierzę	wierzyć (imperf.). Present. 1st person sing.
podjedźmy	podjechać (perf.) Imperative. 2nd person pl.

<i>Word</i>	<i>Origin</i>
bliżej	adv. from blisko . Comparative.
stało się	stać się (imperf.). Past. 3rd person sing.
złego	adj. Gen. after coś .
wysiadłyśmy	wysiąść (perf.) Past. 2nd person pl. fem.
wozu	gen. after z .
po cichutku	adv. from cicho .
zbliżyłyśmy się	zbliżyć się (perf.) Past. 2nd person pl. fem.
samochodu	gen. after do .
przednie	adj. Neut. pl.
światła	neut. pl. Subject of były (past of być , understood).
włączone	adj. from verb włączyć (perf.). Neut. pl.
drzwi	noun, always pl. Subject of były (past of być , understood).
zamknięte	adj. from verb zamknąć (perf.). Neut. pl.
samochodzie	loc after w .
dwoje	number 'two'. Collective form used with 'children'.
chłopczyk	diminutive of chłopiec . Subject of miał .
miał	mieć (imperf). Used with ages. Past, 3rd person sing. masc.
lat	gen. after number greater than 4.
lodowatym	adj. + noun. Loc after w .
pojeździe	
oboje	number 'both'. Collective form used with 'children'.
spali	spać (imperf., actual). Past. 3rd person pl. neut.
gdzie	question word 'where'.
rodzice	noun. Masc. pl. Subject of byli (past of być , 3rd person pl., masc. 'men' understood).
ani śladu	impersonal idiom ' nie było widać ani śladu '. Śladu is gen. after negative verb.
tych biedaków	demonstrative adj. + noun. Acc. plural of ci biedacy .
zostawiono	zostawić (perf.) Adj. participle (passive) in -o (see 5.3.3). 3rd person sing.
pustym parkingu	adj. + noun. Loc. after na .
należącym	adj. Loc. case after na continues.
ogromnego sklepu	adj. + noun + adj. Gen. after do . Masc. sing.
spożywczego	
tego	pronoun. Gen. of to (this) used after do .

<i>Word</i>	<i>Origin</i>
noc wigilijną	noun + adj. Acc of time after w .
wszyscy	noun, masc. pl. Subject of powinni .
powinni	powiniennem (modal, defective). Present, 3rd person pl., masc. 'men' form.
domu	loc. after w .
stole wigilijnym	noun + adj. Loc after przy .
mogło	móc (modal). Past, 3rd person sing., neut. with subject co .
się stać	stać się (perf.) Infinitive after mogło .
rodzicom	masc. pl. Dat. after stać się .
dzwonię	dzwonić (imperf.). Present tense used for future 'will ring'. 1st person sing.
komendę	acc. sing. fem. after na .
jest	być (imperf. actual) Present. 3rd person sing.
ostrym dyżurze	adj + noun. Loc. After na .
przyjadą	przyjechać (perf.) Future, 3rd person pl.
włamią się	włamać się (perf.) Future, 3rd person pl.
obudzą	obudzić (perf.) Future, 3rd person pl.
śpiących	adj. acting as noun. Masc. pl. Acc. Object of obudzą .
wyjaśnią	wyjasnić (perf.) Future, 3rd person pl.
całą sprawę	adj. + noun. Acc sing. fem. Object of wyjaśnią .
miejemy	mieć (imperf. actual). Imperative. 2nd person pl.
nadzieję	acc. fem. sing. Object of miejemy .
chodzi o	chodzić (imperf.). Idiom followed by o . Present, 3rd person sing.
malutkie dzieciaki	adj. + noun. Acc. after o . Masc. pl.

PART II

Parts of speech

This part is divided into chapters dealing with the following parts of speech existing in Polish.

- VERBS **być** (to be), **mieć** (to have), **śpiewać** (to sing)
- NOUNS **chłopiec** (boy), **córka** (daughter), **drzewo** (tree)
- PRONOUNS **on** (he), **jego** (him), **jemu** (to him)
- ADJECTIVES **duży** (big), **tani** (cheap), **mój** (my)
- ADVERBS **szybko** (quickly), **tutaj** (here), **teraz** (now)
- PREPOSITIONS **do** (to), **od** (from), **obok** (beside)
- CONJUNCTIONS **i** (and), **ale** (but), **choć** (although)
- NUMERALS **pięć** (five), **kilka** (several), **ile?** (how many?)
- INTERJECTIONS **Ach** (oh), **No** (Well, now), **Ojej** (Oh, dear!).
Includes idiomatic phrases commonly heard in speech and common greetings.
- PARTICLES **czy** (if), **nie** (not), **by** (various usages)

Note: Polish has no ARTICLES ‘a/an/the’ or ‘some/any’. It relies heavily on case endings to show the relationships between the words in a sentence, e.g.

Chłopiec [subject] **kocha dziewczynę.** [object]
A/the boy loves a/the girl.

Dziewczyna [subject] **kocha chłopca.** [object]
A/the girl loves a/the boy.

Czy masz masło? [object]
Have you got some/any butter?

Nie mam masła. [object. Gen. of negative]
I have no butter.

