

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2015



Problem 3: Polish your Polish!

Polish is spoken by about 40 million people who live in Poland, including about half a million in the UK. If you happen to speak Polish, lucky you! The Polish alphabet is slightly different from ours, and is differently pronounced, but the main thing to know is that *ł* is pronounced 'w'. In Polish grammar, the choice of subject noun affects the shape of the verb, just as it does in English (think of *The girl lives here* but *The girls live here*), but the rules are a bit different, as you will discover. Here are six Polish sentences and their English translations in a jumbled order.

A	Alicja zobaczyła sąsiada.	1	The cat saw the mouse.
B	Kot zjadł kiełbasę.	2	Peter bought the sausage.
C	Piotr kupił kiełbasę.	3	Alice bought the cheese.
D	Mysz zobaczyła sąsiada.	4	Alice saw the neighbour.
E	Kot zobaczył mysz.	5	The mouse saw the neighbour.
F	Alicja kupiła ser.	6	The cat ate the sausage.

Q.3.1. Pair each Polish sentence with its English translation in the table below; for example, if you think Polish sentence A is translated by English sentence 1, write '1' in the box below A.

Polish	A	B	C	D	E	F
English						

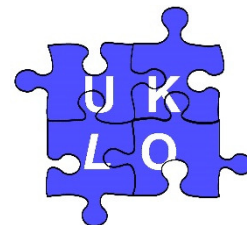
Q.3.2. Complete the table below.

11		Peter saw the neighbour.
12		The mouse ate the cheese.
13	Policja aresztowała sąsiada	The police arrested the neighbour.
14		The police bought the sausage.
15		Peter saw the police.

Q.3.3. How does the choice of subject noun affect the shape of the verb? Try to use the terms 'masculine', 'feminine', 'gender' and 'agree'; if you don't know what they mean, guess!

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Problem 3: Polish your Polish! - solution (18 points)

Scoring

- Q.3.1. 1 point for each correct pairing. (max 6)
- Q.3.2. 2 for each correct translation, 1 if there is a copying error. Don't accept wrong endings on the verbs (highlighted). (max 8)
- Q.3.3. (max 4)
- 4 for a perfect answer which uses all the terms correctly and gives the same information as the model answer.
- 3 if the answer doesn't mention *ł* (which occurs on every verb, so it's general – it marks the past participle, in fact).
- 2 or 1 for less good answers that give some relevant information.

3.1	Polish	A	B	C	D	E	F
	English	4	6	2	5	1	3

3.2.	11	Piotr zobaczył sąsiada.	Peter saw the neighbour.
	12	Mysz zjadła ser.	The mouse ate the cheese.
	13	Policja aresztowała sąsiada	The police arrested the neighbour.
	14	Policja kupiła kiełbasę	The police bought the sausage.
	15	Piotr zobaczył Policja	Peter saw the police.

3.3. The verb agrees in gender with the subject noun; so if the subject noun is masculine, the verb has no suffix after *ł*, but if the subject noun is feminine, the verb ends in *-ła*.

Commentary

Here's one way into this problem, but there are many others.

1. The names are a strong clue, so look for Polish words that look like *Alice* and *Peter*: *Alicja* and *Piotr*. You find *Alice* in two English sentences (3, 4) so these must match Polish sentences A and F, but at this stage we don't know which is which. But *Peter* and *Piotr* only occur in one sentence each, so **C = 2**.
2. This 'Peter' sentence includes 'bought', and so does one of the 'Alice' sentences: 3. But which of A and F could mean 3, 'Alice bought the cheese'? It must be the one that contains

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the same word that means 'bought' in the 'Piotr' sentence. The only possible candidate words are *kupił* in the 'Piotr' sentence and *kupiła* in F. If you think of the English pair *live/lives* (mentioned in the introduction), it's easy to see these Polish words as similarly related: different forms of the same verb. But we still have to explain why they're different, so we note this as an outstanding problem. Meanwhile, though, we've decided that **F = 3**; and that in turn means that **A = 4**. And, incidentally, we also know the Polish for 'cheese', 'sausage' and 'neighbour', since these are the remaining words in these sentences.

3. Stand back and look at the grammar:
 - In all the Polish sentences considered so far, the order of words has been the same as in English. If you're happy with the terms 'subject', 'object' and 'verb', you can describe the word order as 'subject – verb – object'.
 - None of the Polish sentences has contained a word for 'the', so it looks as though this meaning is simply not expressed in Polish.
4. Using the extra vocabulary from the sentences identified so far, we can work out that **B = 6**, i.e. 'The cat ate the sausage' = *Kot zjadł kiełbasę*. And using the grammar from #3, we can be sure that *kot* means '(the) cat' and *zjadł* means 'ate'.
5. As an extra grammatical point, we also notice that all the verbs encountered so far, *zjadł*, *zobaczyła* and *kupił* or *kupiła* end in *-ł* (with or without *-a*), the one letter which was commented on in the introduction. (Always look for hints in the introduction!) So maybe Polish verbs always end in *-ł*, with or without *-a*?
6. Knowing 'cat' shows that **E = 1**, so *Kot zobaczył mysz* means 'The cat saw the mouse', with *zobaczył* as the verb 'saw'. Once again, the verb ends in *-ł*! Even more interestingly, we've already got a verb 'saw', but with a suffixed *-a*: *Alicja zobaczyła sąsiada*, 'Alice saw the neighbour'. And the same verb, in the same form, occurs in sentence D *Mysz zobaczyła sąsiada*, which obviously means 'The mouse saw the neighbour' – i.e. **D = 5**.
7. So returning to #5, why does a verb sometimes have *-a* and sometimes not? The introduction told us that the verb's form was affected by the subject, but not like in English, where the verb's form depends on whether the subject is singular or plural. The key to the answer lies in sentences C and F, where *kupił* is used with *Piotr* and *kupiła* with *Alicja* – where the obvious difference is sex. But we also have *zobaczył* for 'saw' with 'cat' and *zobaczyła* with 'mouse', so it must be more abstract than sex. In other words, we have discovered 'grammatical gender', where nouns are classified in a more or less arbitrary way into 'pretend' male and female groups – 'masculine' and 'feminine'.
8. With the help of the vocabulary and grammar identified so far, the rest of the problem is quite straightforward.