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A case of agree or govern?

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ON COUNTING MEN IN POLISH: A CASE OF AGREE OR GOVERN?

René M. Genis

1 Introduction

In this paper – a mere squib on a rather fundamental but seemingly unresolved issue – I will share some thoughts on Polish NPs in subject position containing a numeral for counting M nouns classed as so-called *męsko-osobowe* ‘male-personal’, also often called *virile*, whose designat is a male person and so they are semantically marked. From this point onward, I will refer to this class simply as M.PERS and oppose it – as is usual – to M nouns that do not refer to ‘male persons’: M.NPERS.¹ The opposition M.PERS : M.NPERS presents a dichotomy that is fundamental to Polish morphosyntax, although restricted to plural number.

To set the scene, here are two examples with (simple) numerals and glosses that represent the more usual syntactic analysis.²

- (1) a *Dwóch mił-ych mnich-ów by-t-o zt-ych.*
Two.GEN nice_monk-M.PERS.GEN.PL are-PRET-N.SG angry-M.PERS.GEN.PL
‘Two nice monks were angry.’
- (1) b *Pięci-u mił-ych mnich-ów by-t-o zt-ych.*
Five.GEN nice_monk-M.PERS.GEN.PL³ are-PRET-N.SG angry-M.PERS.GEN.PL
‘Five nice monks were angry.’⁴

NPs such as under scrutiny here are made up of a numeral, i.e. a “counter”, and a “counted” constituent, here “nice monks”. From this point onward I will refer to the constituents of such NPs in subject position as follows:

- NP_{SUB}[num] the counting constituent = the “counter” = the numeral
NP_{SUB}[c] the counted constituent = the “counted” = noun, adj. etc.

The grammatical case of the numeral in NP_{SUB} is the contentious issue and here the “traditional” – or at least usual – genitive (GEN) is glossed. In short we may formulate 1ab as follows:

NP_{SUB}[num]-GEN[c.M.PERS]-GEN.PL

Again as per traditional Polish grammar, we have case-agreement between the constituents [num] and [c] of the NP_{SUB}. Also, we have to note that the adjective of the nominal predicate agrees with NP_{SUB}[c]- M.PERS.GEN.PL and so we have NP_{PRED}-M.PERS.GEN.PL. The form of the finite verb is most peculiar and I will return to that, after I will have listed all the examples, necessary for a discussion.

As far as I am concerned the “traditional” analysis may be questioned, and part of the reason for this lies in the (other) structures we encounter in Polish NP[num][c], first and foremost in subject position, and so: NP_{SUB}[num][c], to which I shall limit myself in this paper. The “models” containing the other genders – F, N and M.NPERS – but also other constructions with M.PERS usually receive a deviant analysis, and I will try to argue that structures like that in 1ab might be presented differently, more in accordance with those “other” constructions, and so we might discard one of the “syntactic formula’s” that students of Polish have to contend with, as superfluous to requirements.

In the following sections I will first present the other models in two “series”, following the usual way of presenting syntactic models involving numerals (higher than ‘1’):

- a. The 2-3-4-series – includes: ‘2’, ‘3’, ‘4’ and all numerals ending in ‘2’, ‘3’ and ‘4’ except ‘12’, ‘13’, ‘14’ – so, also e.g. ‘22’, ‘173’ and ‘1094’;⁵
- b. The 5-and-higher-series – includes: ‘5’, ‘6’, ‘7’, ‘8’, ‘9’, ‘12’, ‘13’, ‘14’ and all numerals ending in ‘0’, ‘1’, ‘5’, ‘6’, ‘7’, ‘8’, ‘9’, ‘12’, ‘13’, ‘14’.⁶

In the “series”-sections (2 and 3) I will discuss the various component parts encountered and mention other relevant issues in passing. In section 4 I will summarize and propose a new model, the possible repercussions of which are discussed in sections 5 – on the paradigms of numerals, 6 – on the finite verb form and 7 – on predicational adjectives. I will wrap up in section 8.⁷

2 Constructions with the 2-3-4-series of numerals

The first types we need to mention concern M.PERS. First, here are two examples that illustrate that for the numerals for ‘two’, ‘three’ and ‘four’, a possibly older, alternative sentence format is still used, although it is in decline.

- (2) a *Dwaj* *mil-i mnisi* *by-l-i*
 Two.M.PERS.NOM nice_monk-M.PERS.NOM.PL be-PRET-M.PERS.PL
żł-i.
 angry-M.PERS.NOM.PL
 ‘Two nice monks were angry.’

Please note that the NOM.PL-ending for M.PERS-nouns differs for hard stem nouns as opposed to soft stems. This illustrates the fact that M.PERS concerns a semantic category appertaining to nouns with that particular designate class ‘male person’. Hard stem M.PERS-nouns such as *mnich* in 2a take NOM.PL-ending *-i*, which causes so-called softening (palatalization) of the preceding hard consonant that results in the morphological alternation *mnich – mnisi*. Hard stems may also take other specialized endings such as *-owie*, which does not cause softening. Soft and so-called historically soft⁸ stem M-nouns though, generally take NOM.PL-ending *-e*, regardless whether they are M.PERS or M.NPERS. For the sake of completeness, here is an example with a soft stem noun:

- (2) b *Trzej* *mil-i lekarz-e* *by-l-i*
 Three.M.PERS.NOM nice_doctor-M.PERS.NOM.PL be-PRET-M.PERS.PL
żł-i.
 angry-M.PERS.NOM.PL
 ‘Three nice doctors were angry.’

The fact that the numeral as well as the attributive adjective still take their highly marked M.PERS-endings *-(e)j* resp. *-i* demonstrates the strong syntactic relevance of M.PERS as a meaning class for agreement.⁹ In 3ab we see how the NOM.PL-ending for adjectives describing M.NPERS-nouns is *-e* (and this is irrespective of the stem class of the noun, in 3a a soft stem, in 3b a hard one, which shows then, that soft M.PERS nouns and soft M.NPERS nouns cannot be distinguished by their

respective NOM.PL-ending but they are marked by the forms of their attributive adjectives and indeed, also the numerals):

- (3) a *Dwa* *mił-e nietoperz-e* *by-ł-y*
 Two.M.NPERS.NOM nice_bat-M.NPERS.NOM.PL are-PRET-M.NPERS.PL
zł-e.
 angry-M.NPERS.NOM.PL
 ‘Two nice bats were angry.’
- (3) b *Dwa* *mił-e kot-y* *by-ł-y*
 Two.M.NPERS.NOM nice_cat-M.NPERS.NOM.PL are-PRET-M.NPERS.PL
zł-e.
 angry-M.NPERS.NOM.PL
 ‘Two nice cats were angry.’¹⁰

Beyond providing explicit marking, the agreement by attributive adjectives (and pronouns) is syntactically of no consequence for the present discussion.¹¹ What is important though, is the fact that for M.NPERS.NOM.PL the numeral forms are *dwa* ‘2’, *trzy* ‘3’, *cztery* ‘4’ as opposed to *dwaj* ‘2’, *trzej* ‘3’, *czterej* ‘4’ for M.NPERS.NOM.PL. Completing the 2-3-4-series with examples involving N and F nouns will demonstrate that gender+case-agreement may indeed be recognized.

- (4) a *Dwa* *mił-e mieszkani-a* *by-ł-y* *zł-e.*
 Two.N.NOM nice_apartment-N.NOM.PL are-PRET-N.PL bad-N.NOM.PL
 ‘Two nice apartments were bad.’¹²
- (4) b *Dwie* *mił-e żon-y* *by-ł-y* *zł-e.*
 Two.F.NOM kind_wife-F.NOM.PL are-PRET-F.PL angry-F.NOM.PL
 ‘Two kind wives were angry.’

Example 4a has *dwa* which just like *trzy* and *cztery* serve both M.NPERS and N NP_{SUB}[c]s. 4b has *dwie* for F, but note that special F-forms are lacking for *trzy* and *cztery*.

Constructions with numerals of this series may be summarized as follows:

NP_{SUB}[num]-NOM.M.NPERS/N/F[c. M.NPERS/N/F]-NOM.PL

As with the structure of 1ab there is case-agreement between the parts of the NP_{SUB}[num] and NP_{SUB}[c] albeit NOM rather than GEN, and we may here also note the gender-agreement.

Characteristic for this series are furthermore the forms of the finite verb and predicate-adjective, which unlike 1ab, here agree in gender and number with the NP_{SUB}.

3 Constructions with the 5-and-higher-series of numerals

The first examples appertaining to this section is, in fact, 1b and it concerns M.PERS. (1a is, as we have already seen, restricted to M.PERS and syntactically identical even though the numerals are for ‘2’, ‘3’ and ‘4’ and as such belong to the other series.) The following are examples of nouns of the other genders with numerals of the 5-and-higher-series.

- (5) a *Pięć-Ø* *mił-ych kot-ów* *by-t-o*
 five.M.NPERS.NOM nice_cat-M.NPERS.GEN.PL are-PRET-N.SG
zł-ych.
 angry-M.NPERS.GEN.PL
 ‘Five nice cats were angry.’
- (5) b *Pięć-Ø* *mił-ych mieszkań-Ø* *by-t-o* *zł-ych.*
 five.N.NOM nice_apartment-N.GEN.PL are-PRET-N.PL bad-N.PL
 ‘Five nice apartments were bad.’
- (5) c *Pięć-Ø* *mił-ych żon-Ø* *by-t-o* *zł-ych.*
 five.F.NOM nice_wife-F.GEN.PL are-PRET-N.PL angry-F.GEN.PL
 ‘Five nice wives were angry.’

Let’s sum up for the NP_{SUB}:

NP_{SUB}[num]-NOM.M.NPERS/N/F[c. M.NPERS/N/F]-GEN.PL

These structures display gender-agreement although that may not be directly obvious on account of the heavy degree of syncretism. More importantly though, there is no case-agreement between NP_{SUB}[num] and NP_{SUB}[c]! The remainder of

the syntactic structure – finite verb, predicate – can be seen to follow what we already saw in 1ab and I will return to those later in sections 6 and 7 but first, I will take stock of the structures, now that the collection for our present purposes is complete.

4 Summary of NP_{SUB} structures and possible alternative interpretation

This is perhaps a good moment to provide a slightly more palatable summary of the interpretation of these types than that provided by the inline glosses. I would suggest the following.

Str. nr.	NUM-series	gender	NP _{SUB} [num] : NP _{SUB} [c]		examples
[1]	2-3-4	M.PERS	NOM	NOM	2ab
		M.NPERS, N, F	NOM	NOM	3ab, 4ab
[3]	5-and-higher	M.PERS	GEN	GEN	1a
		M.PERS	GEN	GEN	1b
[2]	5-and-higher	M.NPERS, N, F	NOM	GEN	5abc

I take issue with the interpretation so far, as it leads to having to recognize structure number [3], which I think could be argued to be surplus to requirements by (re)interpreting the GEN of the numeral in examples like 1ab as M.PERS.NOM, viz.:

- (1) a' *Dwóch mił-ych mnich-ów by-ł-o*
 Two.M.PERS.NOM nice_monk-M.PERS.GEN.PL are-PRET-N.SG
zł-ych.
 angry-M.PERS.GEN.PL
 'Two nice monks were angry.'
- (1) b' *Pięci-u mił-ych mnich-ów by-ł-o*
 Five.M.PERS.NOM nice_monk-M.PERS.GEN.PL are-PRET-N.SG
zł-ych.
 angry-M.PERS.GEN.PL
 'Five nice monks were angry.'

Thus far, I have not been able to detect that this simple step would lead to any mishaps of the kind that are covered by the traditional analysis, but not by this. Further research and reflection is, surely, warranted but also worthwhile as there is, I think, a great advantage in approaching this matter in this way: the amount of syntactical models we need to address for subject-numeral constructions may be drastically reduced and simplified, as is demonstrated by the following table.

Str. nr.	NUM-series	gender	NP _{SUB} [num] : NP _{SUB} [c]		examples
[1]	2-3-4	all	NOM	NOM	2ab, 3ab, 4ab
[2]		M.PERS	NOM	GEN	1a
	5-and-higher	all	NOM	GEN	1b, 5abc

Also, this approach would allow us to make two sweeping statements:

- a. As head of the NP_{SUB}, the [num] is always in the NOM – anyway the most obvious case for SUB!
- b. Structure [1] is strongly associated with the 2-3-4-series of numerals and has [c] in the NOM, whereas [2] is primarily the domain of the 5-and-higher-series and has [c] in the GEN.

Furthermore, we might present the intermediate structure for 2-3-4 with M.PERS as just that: intermediate, which is of course what it already is in the traditional presentation, but it seems easier as there are less structures in total.

Also easier than before is to maintain, that, whether in structure [1] or [2], the NUM always takes a special form when in adposition to a M.PERS noun, which won't surprise as M.PERS-nouns always require that from their adposited elements. New is then, that we never have to consider GEN anymore in this position.

More tentatively, I propose the following: in structure [1] NP_{SUB}[num] is in adposition to NP_{SUB}[c] with which it therefore agrees. In structure [2] this is reversed, with NP_{SUB}[c] taking the most usual adpositional case, the GEN.

All in all, this approach will add a lot of simplicity and regularity to the matter.

Although at first glance not unattractive – not least as this would suggest being able to do away completely with the idea of having this kind of NP_{SUB} entirely in the GEN! – I think we should perhaps fight urges to immediately accept this

model before we have considered some of the possible consequences, and especially the feasibility of the necessary adjustments to collateral issues. Insofar as I have been able to fathom the extent of the consequences of my proposal to date, a few of these issues will be touched upon in the following sections, which are, as yet, merely intended as food for thought.

5 Adjustment 1: numeral paradigms

In order to fully appreciate what I am suggesting, I present the case-paradigms for two numerals: one representing the 2-3-4-series, the other the five-and-higher-series.

‘Two’¹³ – the 2-3-4-series¹⁴

	M.PERS	M.NPERS	N	F
NOM ¹⁵	<i>dwaj / <u>dwóch</u></i>	<i>dwa</i>		<i>dwie</i>
GEN	<i>dwóch/dwu</i>			
DAT	<i>dwom/dwóm/dwu</i>			
ACC	<i>dwóch</i>	<i>dwa</i>		<i>dwie</i>
INS	<i>dwoma/dwu</i>			<i>dwiema/dwoma</i>
LOC	<i>dwóch/dwu</i>			

What I propose urges us to add *dwóch* as NOM-form for M.PERS next to *dwaj* and this in turn necessitates us to explicitly mention that as main component of the NP_{SUB}, “counter” *dwóch* itself is in NOM with a special form for M.PERS.

‘Five’ – the 5-and-higher-series

	M.PERS	M.NPERS	N	F
NOM	<i><u>pięciu</u></i>	<i>pięć</i>		
GEN	<i>pięciu</i>			
DAT	<i>pięciu</i>			
ACC	<i>pięciu</i>	<i>pięć</i>		
INS	<i>pięciu / pięcioma</i>			
LOC	<i>pięciu</i>			

The underlined numerals are the ones I introduced as per my re-interpretation of the sentence structure. In these tables the positions mark the case of the numerals themselves and so this makes clear my position: *dwóch* and *pięciu* (and the respective series they represent) as NP_{SUB} [num] with [c].M.PERS are themselves in NOM case and “govern” the GEN for their adposited [c]. Seeing the traditional paradigm, it is easy to think why *pięciu* in the SUB-structures under scrutiny was interpreted as GEN and the high degree of syncretism must have paved the way in conjunction with the GEN of the NP_{SUB}[c]: it is easy to think of case-agreement, rather than of gender-agreement + case government. If one realises the limited amount of forms available and thinks of the growing necessity to syntactically mark M.PERS as this semantic category arose in the NOM, it is not hard to imagine that the (almost) only other form readily available and anyway weakly distinctive except for in this position, was selected for this function. But this is of course conjecture.

6 Adjustment 2: explaining the finite verb form

If we maintain that in structure [1] the NP_{SUB}[c] is the main component and everything else agrees, the verb form, nor for that matter the predicational adjective, pose a problem, which they anyway did not in the traditional approach.

The N.SG verb form of structure [2] was traditionally explained as the result of the [c] being in the GEN. I propose, however, to hold to the premise that [c] in structure [2] is in adposition to [num], and so the necessity arises to reconsider the gender of the verb form. I think we should consider this to be a case of simple gender+number-agreement with the numeral – which anyway lacks a plural form –, which in structure [2] is the main component (other than in structure [1]). That numerals could be considered to be N.SG is probably not as shocking as it might first seem when one considers examples such as the following. Some would probably class (6) as substandard but similar examples abound on the internet.

- (6) [...] *pierwsze* *sześć* *lat-Ø* *by-ł-o* *trudn-ych*, [...] ¹⁶
 ... first-N.NOM.SG? six.N.SG year-G.PL are.-PRET-N.SG difficult-G.PL ... ¹⁷
 ‘... the first six years were difficult, ...’

This at least shows how Polish on occasion solves these rather complex issues and perhaps similar things are at play motivating the N.SG in structure [2].¹⁸

7 Adjustment 3: the predicational adjective?

The form of the predicational adjective is no less or in fact more surprising in my proposal than it was in the traditional formula. The examples 1 through 5 all show a strong agreement between NP_{SUB}[c] and NP_{PRED}[adj]. In fact, example 6 also does so quite dramatically. There is, then, perhaps no need to adjust anything in this respect.

8 Final remarks

The model presented in this paper has been used for several years to explain the syntax of NPs with numerals in subject position to students of Polish at the University of Amsterdam – successfully I might add in all humility. As already mentioned earlier, it has not led to any great accident or other mishap but rather, it has made my task as an instructor quite easy compared with the work involved with dealing with the more established, traditional model. Nevertheless, as is part and parcel of the humble phenomenon squib, my proposals here must be considered as just that: proposals. Further research into the possible negative / disadvantageous consequences of the model are still needed.

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Abbreviations

ACC – accusative; [c] – “counted” constituent within a NP; DAT – dative; F – feminine; GEN – genitive; INS – instrumental; LOC – locative; M – masculine; M.NPERS – masculine non-personal; M.PERS – masculine personal (sometimes “virile”); N – neuter; NOM – nominative; NP – noun phrase; NUM – numeral; [num] – numeral = “counter” constituent within a NP; PL – plural; PRED – predicate; PRET – preterite; SG – singular; SUB – subject.

Notes

- 1 Restrictions of space and time prevent me from going into the matter of the makeup of the classes of M.PERS resp. M.NPERS nouns. Cf. also note 9.
- 2 The most explicit presentation of the principles under discussion I found is in Damerau (1967: 67) which presents the crux of the “traditional” explanation thus: “In Verbindung mit männlichen Personen zeigen die Kardinalzahlen eine Sonderentwicklung. Von 2 an wird der Nom. [...] der

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Kardinalzahl *durch den Genitiv ersetzt* [my emphasis – rg]. Das abhängige Nomen steht im Gen. Pl., das Verb in der 3. Pers. Sg. [...] in der Form des Neutrums.” Swan (2002: 193) speaks of “[...] a construction that is identical to the Genitive-Accusative. The ending [of the numeral – rg] is always -u.” All the Polish texts I could gather on this subject hold to the same, albeit sometimes reasoned differently, with the exception of Nagórko (1998: 149-150), who actually goes into this matter much as I propose, only rather too briefly to my taste, leaving quite a few of the matters I try to discuss here quite unresolved. Saloni & Świdziński (1998) seem to leave the actual interpretation of these syntactic groups open to interpretation (esp. 1998: 206 a.f.) although many things are left open to interpretation. Saloni (1977) is, in my view, probably the most important publication to date on issues related to those under scrutiny here; he too doesn’t go quite as far as I propose.

3 Here as elsewhere in this contribution, the space restrictions imposed by the format of the series stylesheet urged me to cut some corners and the annotation for noun and attributive adjective – in full agreement – has been shortened; it should of course read thus in 1ab:

<i>mił-ych</i>	<i>mnich-ów</i>
nice-M.PERS.GEN.PL	monk-M.PERS.GEN.PL

I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause, although I am quite sure no vital information has in fact been obscured by the shortened representation.

4 The morphological opposition 1a and 1b offer is one of NUM.G as opposed to NUM-G. As far as I am aware that difference is of no consequence to this discussion.

5 Some divergence may occur, e.g. on account of a reversed word order:

<i>Lat-Ø</i>	<i>dwadzieścia dwa</i>	<i>minę-t-o ...</i>
Year-N.GEN.PL	twenty_two.N.NOM	pass.PRET.N.SG

‘Twenty two years passed.’

(<http://www.wsowlzegrze.republika.pl/jerzy/reminiscencje.htm> – retrieved 2 Sept. 2017.).

In a more normal order this would be rendered:

<i>Dwadzieścia dwa</i>	<i>lat-a</i>	<i>minę-t-y ...</i>
twenty_two.N.NOM	Year-N.NOM.PL	pass.PRET.N.PL

6 Two further things need to be noted: 1) usually indefinite numerals such as *kilka* ‘several’, *wiele* ‘many’ etc. behave as this class as well, but they are left out of the present discussion; 2) I will also leave aside structures with high numbers *tysiąc* ‘thousand’, *milion* ‘million’ etc. as these are – strictly grammatically speaking – not numerals, but nouns. A full discussion of these structures is beyond the scope and possibilities of this squib but in my estimation will also not substantially add to the discussion.

7 I had hoped to be able to go into these matters also from the diachronic perspective – especially as Janneke Kalsbeek takes a keen interest in matters historical – but limitations of time and space (in this Festschrift!) prevented me from doing so. I will have to postpone that to a later date.

8 A class of phonetically hard sibilants that developed from soft consonants, which morpho(no)logically, however, still function as soft consonants: *c /c/, cz /č/, sz /š/, ź /ź/ /ż/, rz /ż/ /ź/, dz /ʒ/ /c/, dż /ʒ/ /č/*.

9 Mieczkowska (1995: 19) as well as Mindak (1990: 18) and a few others they refer to, discuss the functioning (syntactic and otherwise) of M.PERS nouns primarily as a *rodzaj semantyczny* ‘semantic gender’ rather than as *rodzaj formalnogramatyczny* ‘formal-grammatical’ gender class. As such the class is marked to a very high degree as in the NOM.PL adjectives, pronouns and indeed numerals only have two possible endings: one strictly limited for use with M.PERS and the other for all the other genders M.NPERS, N and F.

10 Although in singular number the opposition animate : inanimate is important, in modern Polish it does not concern numeral constructions in the plural and so it was deemed unnecessary to provide an example with an inanimate M-noun.

11 In fact, in terms of morphology more could be said about the various paradigms and stem classes etc., but as that is not relevant for the present discussion, I shall leave that for what it is.

12 The adjective *zły* may be translated as ‘bad’, ‘wrong’ but also as ‘angry’, ‘cross’ etc. I have adjusted the translation to fit the noun without paying any special attention, as it is not important for this discussion.

13 Of the three numbers of this series, ‘two’ has the most extensive paradigm and ‘three’ and ‘four’ have further syncretism as F.NOM, F.ACC and F.INS share forms with M.NPERS and N.

14 In this table the supposedly preferred form when there are more than one is mentioned first.

15 The vocative case has no separate form in plural in Polish and so it is omitted in these tables.

16 <http://portalkatowicki.pl/kultura/muzyka-klasyczna/2673-robie-to-co-kocham-rozmowa-z-grzegorzem-niemczukiem?showall=&start=2> – Retrieved 2 Sept. 2017.

17 The interpretation that *pierwsze* is in the N.SG rather than a non-M.PERS nominative may be disputed with examples like the following, which also abound on the internet:

- (7) *Pierwsze* *sześć lat-Ø* *by-ł-y [...]* *traumatyczn-e.*
 ‘first-N.NOM.PL six.?’ year-G.PL are.PRET.N.PL traumatic-N.NOM.PL.
 ‘The first six years were [...] traumatic.’

Please note that all instances of N could also be read F or M.NPERS. One thing may be clear: there is no real consistency in this matter.

18 Swan (2002: 196) comments that “[...] *wszystkie dziesięć filmów* ‘all ten movies’ will be preferred over possible *wszystkich dziesięć filmów*”, which latter is, however, often explained away as the correct construction.

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