

Fennell & Gelsen: A Grammar of Modern Latvian. 1980

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LESSON 1

THE PRESENT TENSE OF *BŪT*: NOMINATIVE SINGULAR AND PLURAL OF MASCULINE NOUNS IN -S

The verb *būt* 'to be' is conjugated in the Present tense as follows:

| | |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| <i>es esmu</i> | I am |
| <i>tu esi</i> | you (singular) are |
| <i>viņš ir</i> | he is |
| <i>viņa ir</i> | she is |
| <i>mēs esam</i> | we are |
| <i>jūs esat</i> | you (plural) are |
| <i>viņi ir</i> | they (masculine) are |
| <i>viņas ir</i> | they (feminine) are |

The form *tu esi* is used only when addressing a person who is a close friend. Adults will normally use it when speaking to a child, and children will normally use it speaking one to another. Its use is, however, restricted to the singular. When addressing more than one person, whatever the circumstances, the form *jūs esat* must always be used. *Jūs esat* is also the polite singular form.

A great number of Latvian nouns belong to the masculine -s declension, in which the nominative singular consists of a stem plus *s*, and the nominative plural consists of the same stem plus *i*. Compare:

| | | | | |
|---------------|-------|------|---------------|--------|
| <i>zirg-s</i> | horse | with | <i>zirg-i</i> | horses |
| <i>lauk-s</i> | field | with | <i>lauk-i</i> | fields |

Note that there are no articles, definite or indefinite, in Latvian; thus *zirgs* can mean equally well 'a horse', 'the horse', or just simply 'horse'. The same applies in the plural, where *zirgi* may mean either 'the horses', 'some horses', or just 'horses'.

The following nouns are all identical in type with *zirgs* and *lauks*, i.e., they all have their nominative singular in -s and their nominative plural in -i.

Vocabulary

| | | | |
|------------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
| <i>zirgs</i> | horse | <i>nams</i> | city house |
| <i>lauks</i> | field | <i>tēvs</i> | father |
| <i>mēžs</i> | forest, wood | <i>dēls</i> | son |
| <i>ārsts</i> | doctor | <i>tur</i> | there |
| <i>skolotājs</i> | school-teacher | <i>kur</i> | where |
| <i>cilvēks</i> | person | <i>būt</i> | to be |
| <i>un</i> | and | | |

NOTES: Before the unvoiced *-s* ending of the Nom. Sing., the *-g-* of *zirgs* and the *-ž-* of *mēžs* are devoiced to *-k-* and *-š-* respectively. The voiced sounds *-g-* and *-ž-* are heard in all other forms of these words. Similarly, other voiced consonants are devoiced in this position, e.g., *-b-* to *-p-*, *-d-* to *-t-*, *-z-* to *-s-*, and sometimes *-v-* to *-f-* (but not in *tēvs*).

In a few words, *-v-* before *-s* is lost altogether. Thus *tēvs* is pronounced *tēs* in the nominative singular. The voiced *-v-* will, of course, be heard in all other forms of the word.

Notice the word order in questions beginning with *kur*.

Kur viņi ir? BUT *Kur ir zirgs?*

When a pronoun is the subject of the verb *būt* in such questions, inversion of subject and verb will not occur; where the subject is a noun, the inversion will occur. If the question involves a verb other than *būt*, the inversion does *not* occur, whether the subject be a noun or a pronoun.

Exercise 1a

Complete the conjugation, omitting the forms with *viņa* and *viņas*:

1. *Es esmu ārsts.*
2. *Es esmu skolotājs.*
3. *Es esmu tēvs.*
4. *Es esmu dēls.*

Exercise 1b

Translate into English:

1. Viņš ir ārsts. Viņi ir ārsti.
2. Es esmu skolotājs. Mēs esam skolotāji.
3. Tu esi tēvs. Jūs esat tēvi.

4. Es esmu dēls, un tu esi dēls; mēs esam dēli.
5. Mēs esam ārsti; jūs esat skolotāji.
6. Mēs un jūs esam cilvēki.
7. Ārsti ir cilvēki; skolotāji ir cilvēki.
8. Kur ir tēvi un dēli? — Tēvi un dēli ir tur.
9. Kur ir nams? Nams ir tur.
10. Kur ir lauks? Lauks ir tur.
11. Kur ir lauki? Lauki ir tur.
12. Kur ir mežs? Mežs ir tur.
13. Kur ir meži? Meži ir tur.
14. Lauki un meži ir tur.
15. Tu esi skolotājs, un viņš ir ārsts.
16. Kur viņi ir? Viņi ir tur.
17. Tur viņi ir.
18. Jūs esat ārsti.
19. Kur viņa ir? Viņa ir tur.
20. Kur ir nami? Nami ir tur.
21. Nams un lauks ir tur.
22. Viņš ir skolotājs, viņš ir cilvēks.
23. Kur ir zirgi? Zirgi ir tur.
24. Es esmu skolotājs; skolotājs ir cilvēks.
25. Kur ir tēvs?
26. Kur ir zirgs? Zirgs ir tur.
27. Tēvs ir cilvēks.
28. Kur viņas ir? Viņas ir tur.
29. Kur viņa ir? Viņa ir tur.

Exercise 1c

Translate into Latvian:

1. Where are the doctors and where are the teachers?
2. The horses and fields are there.
3. He is a father, and they are sons.
4. The forests are there.
5. There are houses there.
6. You are a doctor; I am a teacher.
7. There is the field.
8. We are fathers; you are a son.
9. Fathers and sons are people.
10. I am a person and you are a person: we are people.
11. Where is she? She is there.

12. Where are the horse and the field? The horse and the field are there.
13. Where are they (f.)? They (f.) are there.
14. Where is the horse? Where are the horses?
15. The horse, the field and the forest are there.
16. Where are you?
17. There are the people.
18. I am a doctor: you are a teacher.
19. He is a doctor: we are teachers.
20. Where is the son? He is there.
21. There are the fields, and there is the forest.
22. The father is a doctor and the son is a teacher.
23. The sons are teachers and the fathers are doctors.
24. Where is she? She is there.

LESSON 2

SINGULAR DECLENSION OF MASCULINE NOUNS IN -S

Latvian is an inflected language, and its nouns can be considered as having five cases: Nominative, Accusative, Genitive, Dative and Locative. Each case of the noun requires a different ending. We have already met the endings of the Nominative singular and plural, -s and -i respectively. We are now concerned with the five case endings of the singular, which are as follows:

| | | |
|------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| Nominative | <i>zirg-s</i> | (a, the) horse (subject) |
| Accusative | <i>zirg-u</i> | (a, the) horse (object) |
| Genitive | <i>zirg-a</i> | of a horse, of the horse |
| Dative | <i>zirg-am</i> | to a horse, to the horse |
| Locative | <i>zirg-ā</i> | in a horse, in the horse |

We cannot as yet use all of these cases in sentences, as our limited vocabulary restricts us to the Nominative, Genitive and Locative.

Notice the use of these three cases:

NOM. *Tēvs ir tur.* The father is there.

In this sentence, the word 'father' is the subject, and is therefore in the nominative case. Similarly in the plural,

Tēvi ir tur. The fathers are there.

GEN. *Tur ir ārsta nams.* There is the doctor's house.

The genitive of *ārstis*, i.e., *ārsta*, means 'of the similarly, *tēva dēls* 'the father's son'; *skolotāja* and *drauga dārzs* 'the garden of the friend'. Not precedes its noun in Latvian, just as the forms English.

LOC. *Zirgs ir mežā.* The horse is in the forest.
Viņš ir pagrabā. He is in the cellar.
Galdi ir namā. The tables are in the house.

Notice the change of emphasis when these sentences

Mežā ir zirgs. There is a horse in the forest.
Namā ir galdi. There are tables in the house.

All the nouns in the following vocabulary are masculine. Notice the pattern given above for *zirgs*.

Vocabulary

| | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| <i>galds</i> | table | <i>bērnš</i> |
| <i>jumts</i> | roof | <i>dārzs</i> |
| <i>putns</i> | bird | <i>draugs</i> |
| <i>koks</i> | tree, wood | <i>bet</i> |
| <i>vīns</i> | wine | <i>arī</i> |
| <i>kalni</i> | mountain, hill | <i>akl</i> |
| <i>pagrabs</i> | cellar | |

NOTES: The nouns *galds*, *pagrabs*, *dārzs* and *draugs* deviced consonant (*t, p, s, k* respectively) in the Nominative singular. The phrase *koka galds* 'a wooden table'.

In addition to the five cases given above, there is also the Locative plural, which we shall be concerned at a later stage.

Exercise 2a

1. Give the accusative singular of: *galds*; *vīns*; *lauks*;
2. Give the genitive singular of: *zirgs*; *skolotājs*; *bērns*;
3. Give the dative singular of: *ārstis*; *tēvs*; *draugs*; *putns*;
4. Give the locative singular of: *mežs*; *nams*; *dārzs*; *koks*.